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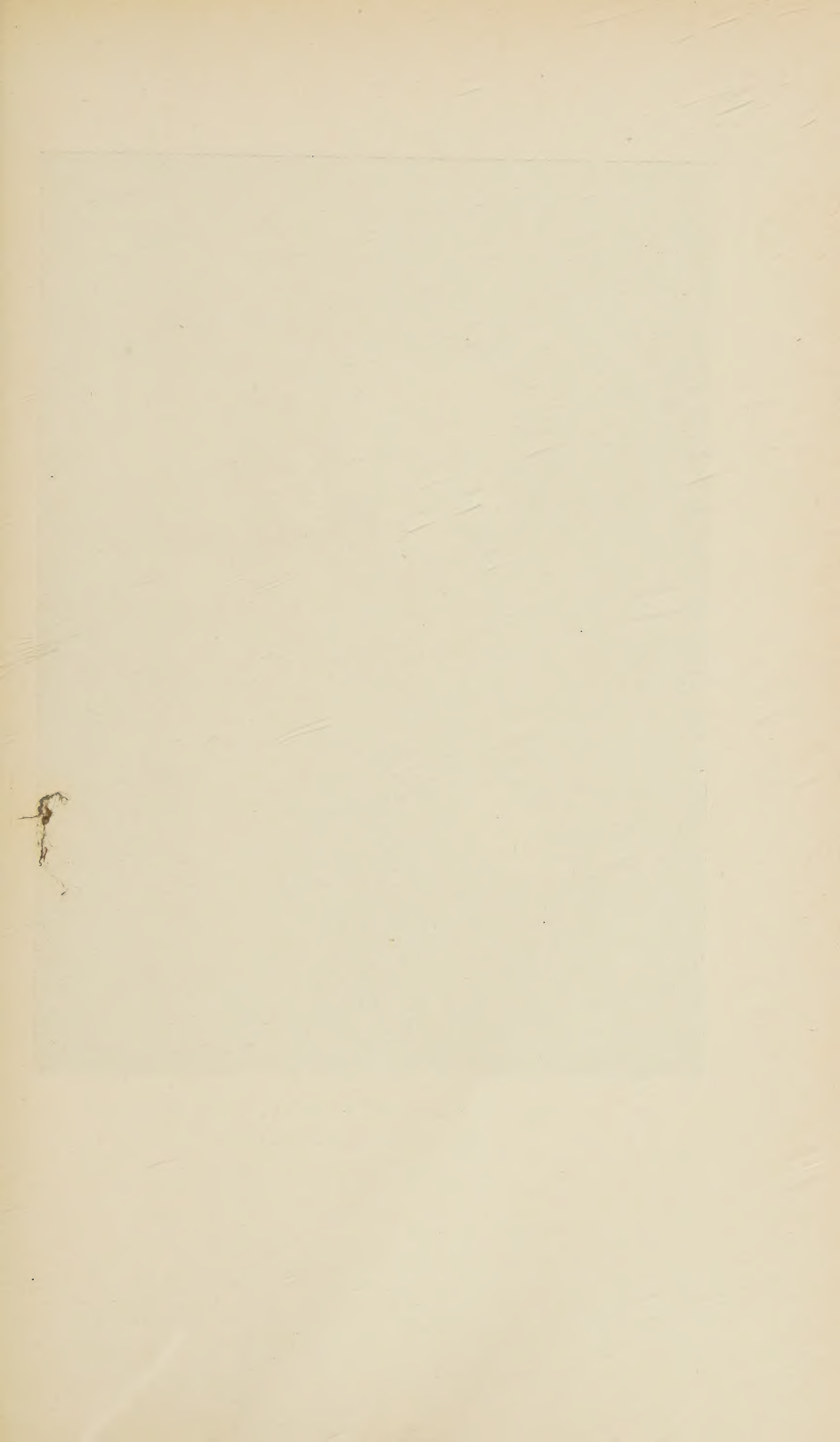


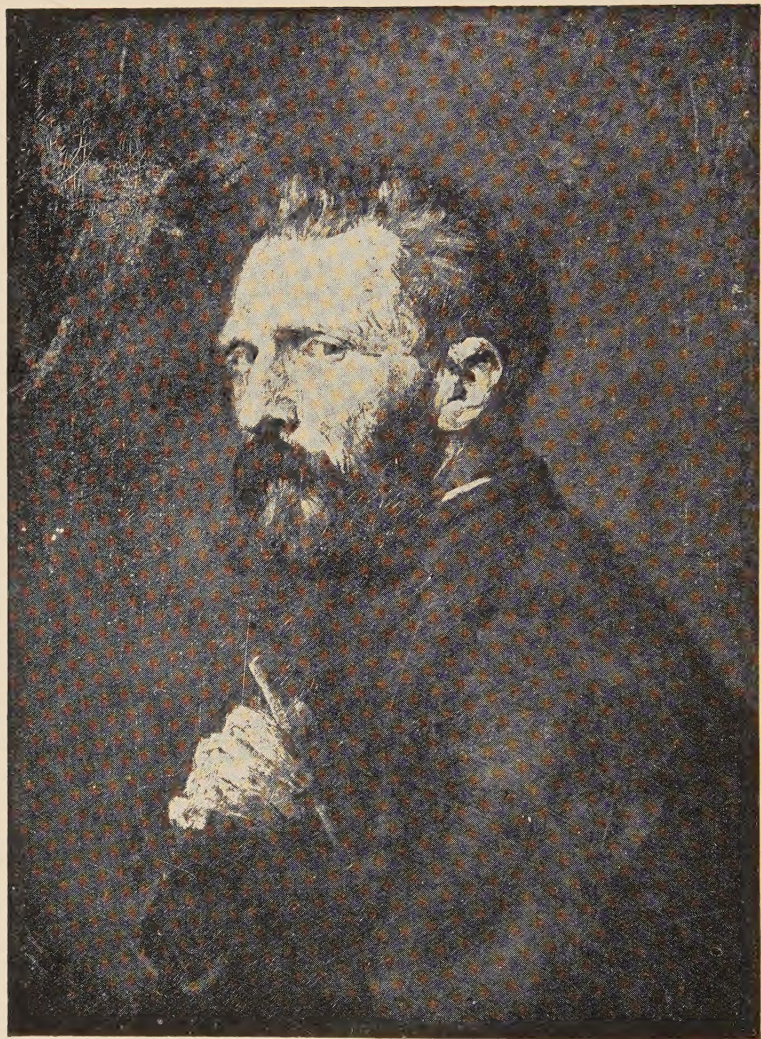


THE LETTERS OF  
VINCENT VAN GOGH









VINCENT VAN GOGH

*After an oil painting by Russell.*

THE LETTERS OF  
VINCENT VAN GOGH  
TO HIS BROTHER

1872-1886

With a Memoir by his Sister-in-law  
J. van Gogh-Bonger

IN TWO VOLUMES  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

VOL. II

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# VINCENT VAN GOGH

THE HAGUE

DECEMBER 1881—SEPTEMBER 1883

CONTINUED

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Dear Theo,

November 1st (1882).

For the last few days I have been very much preoccupied by something that possibly may interest you also, and I think it quite worth while to write to you in detail about it. In a letter from Rappard, I received the summary of a discourse by Herkomer about modern woodcuts. I cannot tell you the whole in detail; perhaps you have read the article yourself, (it appeared in an English magazine about art, perhaps the *Art Journal*). It was especially about the drawings in the *Graphic*. Herkomer tells how he himself worked for it with great ambition and enthusiasm, and recalls especially the splendid pages from the first series. He can hardly find words to express how strongly he feels the importance of the work of those original artists. He gives a survey of the progress in technique and *process* and of the difference between the old and the modern woodcuts, etc. etc.

Then he speaks about the present and comes to the real point of his discourse. He says that the wood engravers are more clever than ever, but I for my part see a decadence when I think of the time when the *Graphic* started. And he continues: "according to my opinion, the fault lies in two things, against which I protest. The one concerns the managers and the other concerns the artists.

"Both make mistakes and these will spoil the thing if they are not put down."

The managers, he says, ask for things that are made for effect; correct and honest drawing is no longer wanted, complete designs

are no longer in demand, a "bit" just covering an awkward corner of a page is all that is requested.

The managers declare that the public require the representation of a public event or so, and are satisfied if it is correct and entertaining, caring nothing for the artistic qualities of the work. I do not believe what they say.

The only excuse that can be accepted is "dearth of good draughtsmen." . . . Then he comes to the artists, and says how he regrets that nowadays it is but too often the wood engraver and not the draughtsman who makes the pages beautiful.

He spurs on the artists not to permit this, to draw soberly and strongly, so that the engraver remains what he must be: the interpreter of the work of the draughtsman and not his master. Then follows his conclusion, a strong admonition to all to keep heart for the job, and not to allow any weakening to take place.

In his voice sounds something of a reproach, and he speaks not without some melancholy and as if fighting against what he thinks unbearable indifference.

"To you—the public—the art offers infinite pleasure and edification. For you it is really done. Therefore clamour loudly for good work, and be sure it will be forthcoming," is his last word.

The whole is thoroughly healthy, strong, honest. His way of speaking gives me the same impression as some letters by Millet. To me it is an inspiration, and it does my heart good to hear someone talk in this way.

I say that it is a great pity there is little or no animation here for the art which is most fit for the general public.

If the painters combined to take care that their work (which in my opinion is after all made for the people, at least I think this is the highest, noblest calling for any artist) could indeed come into the hands of the public and was brought within everybody's reach, that would be something that could give the same results as those acquired during the first years of the *Graphic*.

Neuhuijs, Van der Velden and a few others made this year drawings for the "Swallow," a paper that appears monthly and costs  $7\frac{1}{2}$  cents. There are some good ones among them, but one can see that the greater part of them are done with a flabby hand (not the original drawings but the way of popularizing

them), and as I hear the paper cannot keep up any more than its predecessors. Why not? The publishers say there is no profit in it, and instead of promoting the circulation they keep it back.

And I think that the painters, for their part, do not take the matter strongly enough to heart.

The definition that many a painter here in Holland gives to the question: "What is a woodcut?" is: "They are *those things* that lie in the South Holland Café." So they class them among the drinks. And those who make them perhaps among the drunkards.

And the dealers, what do they say? Suppose I went with a hundred sketches which I happen to have collected to any dealer here, I fear that the only answer I should get would be: "Did you perhaps expect *these things* to have any market value."

My love and respect for the great draughtsmen, those of the time of Gavarni, as well as for those of the present, increases the more I learn to know their work, and especially since I myself try to make something of what one sees every day on the street.

What I appreciate in Herkomer, in Fildes, in Holl and the other founders of the *Graphic*, the reason why they are still more sympathetic to me than Gavarni and Daumier and will remain so is, that while the latter seem to consider society with malice, the former, as well as men like Millet, Breton, de Groux, Israëls, chose subjects as true as those of Gavarni or Daumier, but that have something noble and have a more serious sentiment. That sentiment especially must remain, I think. An artist needn't be a clergyman or a churchwarden, but he certainly must have a warm heart for his fellow-men, and I think it very noble, for instance, that no winter passed without the *Graphic* doing something to arouse sympathy for the poor; for example, I have a page by Woodville representing a distribution of peat tickets in Ireland, another by Staniland called: "Help the Helpers," representing different scenes in a hospital that was short of money; "Christmas in the Workhouse" by Herkomer, "Homeless and Hungry" by Fildes, etc. I like that still better than the drawings by Bertall or the like, for the "Vie Élégente" or other elegancies. Perhaps you think this letter tedious—but it came all fresh in my thoughts again. I had collected and mounted my hundred studies and when I had finished the job a rather melancholy feeling came

over me of "what's the use?"—but then that energetic word by Herkomer, who summons the people not to flag and says that it is more than ever necessary to keep the hand to the plough, comforted me so, and I thought I would give you a short summary of the contents of what he said. A handshake in thought, believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

I hope to hear from you soon. I had a good letter from home.

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Dear Theo,

Your letter and its contents were very welcome to me. The question you refer to will perhaps become more and more urgent. People will be obliged to acknowledge that many a new thing in which one at first thought to find progress proves in fact to be less sound than the old one, and in consequence the need of strong men to redress things will manifest itself. As arguing about this can do little good to the matter, I think it rather superfluous to write more about it.

But I can hardly say that I share your thought which you express in the following words: "To me it seems quite natural that the desired change will come." Just think how many great men are dead or will not be with us for long—Millet, Brion, Troyon, Rousseau, Daubigny, Corot—so many others are no longer among the living; think further back, Leys, Gavarni, de Groux (I only name a few), still further back, Ingres, Delacroix and Gericault, think how old *modern art* already is, add still many others who already have reached old age.

Up to Millet and Jules Breton there was, however, always progress in my opinion, but to surpass these two,—don't mention it.

Their genius may be equalled in former, present or later times, but to surpass it is not possible. In that high zone, there is an equality of genii, but higher than the top of the mountain one

cannot climb. Israël, for instance, may equal Millet, but among genii, superiority or inferiority is out of the question.

Now in the realm of art the summit has been reached. Certainly we shall still see beautiful things in the years to come, but anything more sublime than we have seen already,—no. And I for my part am afraid that perhaps in a few years there will be a kind of panic in this form. Since *Millet* we have greatly deteriorated, the word decadence, now whispered or pronounced in hidden terms, (see Herkomer) will then sound as an alarm bell. Many an one, for instance, I myself, keeps quiet now because one has already the name of *mauvais coucheur*, and to speak about it doesn't help. That, namely, to speak about it, is not what one has to do, one must work, be it with a sorrowful heart; those who afterwards will cry the hardest about decadence will be the most decadent themselves. I repeat—"By these things ye shall know them," by their work, neither will it be the most eloquent who will say the truest things, look at Millet himself, look at Herkomer, they are no orators indeed and they speak almost *à contre cœur*.

Enough of this, I find in you someone who understands many of the great men, and I think it delightful to hear now and then things about them which I did not know; for instance, what you tell me about Daumier. The series of portraits of deputies, etc., the picture "*Wagon 3ième classe, la Révolution*," I know none of them. It is true that your writing about it doesn't make me see them myself, but in my imagination Daumier's personality becomes more important through it. I prefer to hear about such men more than, for instance, about the last Salon.

Now what you write about the *Vie Moderne*, or rather about the kind of paper that Buhot had promised you,—this is something which interests me very much. Do I understand it rightly, that this paper is such that when one makes a drawing on it (I suppose with autographic ink) this drawing *just as it is*, without the intermediary of a second draughtsman or engraver or lithographer, can be transferred on a stone, or a cliché can be made of it, so that an indefinite number of copies can be drawn? The latter then being facsimiles of the original drawing. If this is so, be so kind then as to give me all information you can pick up about the way in which one has to work on this paper, and try to get me some of it, so that I can give it a trial.

If I could make a trial before you come, we might on that occasion consult about what we can do with it.

I think it possible that within a relatively short time, there will perhaps be a greater demand than there is at present for employees for illustration.

As for me, if I fill my portfolios with studies from the models I can get hold of or catch, I will have some little outfit which I hope will help me to get employment. *To keep up* illustrating, as for instance Morin, Lançon, Renouard, Jules Ferat, Worms in his time, one needs quite a lot of ammunition, in the form of different studies on all kinds of subjects.

Those I try to get together, as you know, and as you will see when you come.

By the by, until now I have not received the package of studies, which according to your letter you returned to me via the Rue Chaptal. Do you think they have already arrived at the Plaats? If you think so I will send for them, as they will be of use to me in connection with things which I recently made.

Do you know whose portrait I drew this morning? Blok, the Jewish book dealer, not David, but the little one who stands on the Binnenhof.

I wish I could draw more members of that family, for they are real good types.

It's awfully difficult to get the types which one likes best; meanwhile I think I'm right in making *those I can get*, without losing sight of those I would draw if only I could get them.

I am very glad about Blok, he reminds me of things many years ago. I hope he will come again some Sunday morning.

Of course one always feels, and one must feel, when at work, a kind of dissatisfaction with oneself, a longing to do it much better; but still it is delightful and comforting to get little by little a collection of all kinds of figures together, though the more one makes the more one wants to make.

One cannot do everything at once, but it will be absolutely necessary for me to make a number of horse studies, not only just scratches made in the street, but to take a model for it. I know an old white horse, just the poorest nag imaginable (at the gas-works) but the man, who lets the poor beast do the hardest possible jobs, and draws from it what he can get, asked me much



for it, namely, three guilders a morning to come to me, one guilder and a-half at least to come to him, but then it must be on a Sunday.

And when you consider that to get what I need, about thirty large studies for instance, I should have to work many a morning, it proves to be too expensive. But I shall get a better chance some time.

I can get a horse here and there easily enough for a *very short* time, people are willing enough for that; but in a very short time one *cannot* do what really must be done, so that does not help me much.

I try to work quickly, for that is necessary, but a study that is of any use requires at least half an hour, for instance, so one always falls back upon the real posing. At Scheveningen, for instance, on the beach, I have had a boy or man standing for me for a moment as they call it; the result was always a great longing in me for a longer pose, and the mere standing still of a man or a horse doesn't satisfy me.

If I am well informed, the draughtsmen for the *Graphic* could in turn always find a model at their disposal in a studio at the office. Dickens tells a few good things about the painters of *his* time and their wrong way of working, namely, their following the model servilely, yet only half-way. He says: "Fellows, try to understand that your model is *not* your final aim, but *the means of giving form and strength to your thought and inspiration*. Look at the French (for instance, Ary Scheffer) and see how much better they do it than you do." It seems the English have listened to him, *they* continued working with the model, but they have learned to view the model in a broader, stronger way and to use it for healthier, nobler compositions than those of the painters of Dickens's time.

Two things that remain eternally true and that complete each other in my opinion are: Do not quench your inspiration and your imagination, do not become the slave of your model; and the other is: Take the model and study it, otherwise your inspiration never takes a plastic mould.

When your letter came, I had immediately many things to pay. I hope it will not inconvenience you to send again not later than the 10th of November. That question of the process about



which Buhot spoke to you seems very important to me you know. I shall be very happy to learn it and will try my best to do so.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Do you know what effects one sees here at present early in the morning?—it is splendid—such as Brion painted in his picture at the Luxembourg: “*La Fin du Déluge*,” namely, that streak of red light at the horizon with rain clouds over it. This brings me to the landscape painters. Compare those of the time of Brion with the present. Is it better now? I doubt it.

I will readily acknowledge that they are more productive now, but though I cannot help admiring what is made now, the old landscapes done in a more old-fashioned way please me whenever I see them. There was a time when I for instance passed a Schelfout thinking: that’s not worth while.

But the modern way, though it has its attraction, in the long run doesn’t make that strong, deep impression, and when one has been looking for a long time at new things, one sees again with great pleasure a naïve picture like a Schelfout or a Ségé, a Jules Bakhuizen. It is really not intentionally when I feel rather disenchanted about the progress, on the contrary quite against my will, the feeling involuntarily developed in my thoughts, because I feel more and more a kind of void, which I cannot fill with the things of to-day.

While I am looking for an example, I happen to think of old woodcuts by Jacque, which I saw at least ten years ago at Uncle Cor’s, it was a series: “*Les Mois*,” they were done in the manner of those etchings which appeared in yearly series, or even more old-fashioned still. There is less of the local tone in it than in his later work, but the drawing and something pithy remind one of Millet. Look here, in the many sketches in to-day’s magazines, it seems to me that a not quite unconventional elegance threatens to replace that typical, real rusticity of which the sketches of Jacque, which I mentioned, are an example.

Don’t you think the cause of this lies also in the life and personality of the artists? I do not know your experience, but do you find, for instance at present, many people who like to take a

walk in grey weather? You yourself would love it and enjoy it as I do, but for many people it would be a nuisance. It also struck me, that when one speaks with painters, the conversation in most cases is *not* interesting. Mauve has at times the great power of describing a thing in words so that one sees it, and certainly others have that too, when they like. But that peculiar open-air feeling when you speak to a painter,—do you think it is as strong as it used to be?

I read this week in Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*, all kinds of particulars about long walks on Hampstead Heath, etc., outside London, with the object of eating for instance bacon and eggs in a little old inn far away, quite in the country. Those walks were very pleasant and merry, but, for all that, it was generally in this way that serious plans were made for books, or discussions were held about what changes Dickens should make in this or that figure. There is nowadays a hurry and bustle in everything that doesn't please me, and it seems as if life has gone out of most things. I wish your expectation would come true: "That the desired change will come," but to me it doesn't seem "quite natural."

However this may be, it is of very little use to oppose in words I think, and the thing for everyone to do who has an interest in the matter is to try in his little circle to make something or to help make something.

I worked again at a water-colour of miners' wives who carry bags of coal in the snow. But especially I drew about twelve studies of figures for it and three heads, and I am not ready yet. In the water-colour I think I found the effect, but I do not think it broad enough of character. In reality it is something like "The Reapers" by Millet, severe, so you understand that one mustn't make a snow effect of it, which would be but an impression and would only then have its *raison d'être* if it were done for the sake of the landscape. I think I will start anew, though the studies that I have for the present will please you, because they succeeded better than many others. It would be really fit for the *Vie Moderne* I think. When I get the paper I have already *one* of the figures to make a trial, but it must become a group of women, a small caravan.

Dear Theo,

On Sundays I usually feel like writing to you, and so I do to-day. The last few days I have been reading *Le Nabob* by Daudet and I think it a masterpiece,—for instance, that walk of Le Nabob and Heinerlingue, the banker, on Père-Lachaise in the twilight, while the bust of Balzac, a dark silhouette against the sky, looks down upon them ironically. That is exactly like a drawing by Daumier. You wrote me about Daumier, that he had made *La Revolution*—Denis Dessoubs. When you wrote this, I didn't know who Denis Dessoubs was, now I read about him in the history of a crime by Victor Hugo. He is a noble figure, I wish I knew the drawing by Daumier. Of course I can read no book about Paris without thinking at once of you. Neither can I read a book about Paris without finding in it something of the Hague, which indeed is much smaller than Paris but is nevertheless also a royal residence with its appropriate fashions.

When you say in your last letter: "What a mystery nature is," I quite agree with you. Life in the abstract is already an enigma, reality makes it an enigma within an enigma. And who are we to solve it? However, we ourselves are an atom of that universe about which we question: Where does it go, to the devil or to God?

*Pourtant le soleil se lève*—Already, long long ago, I read in *le lève*, says Victor Hugo. Already, long long ago, I read in *Friend Fritz* by Erckmann-Chatrian, a word from the old Rabbi, which I always remember: "nous ne sommes pas dans la vie pour être heureux, mais nous devons tâcher de mériter le bonheur." Taken separately, there is something pedantic in this thought, at least one *might* take it as such, but in the connection in which the word occurred, that is in the mouth of that sympathetic figure of the old Rabbi, David Sechel, it touched me deeply and I often think of it. Also in drawing, one must not count on selling one's drawings, but it is one's duty to make them so that they have value and are serious, one may not become careless or indifferent even though disappointed by circumstances. In regard to my plan for the lithographs, I have often thought it over, if I hadn't done more than that I fear it wouldn't have advanced me much, for what shall I think about it?

So again I have made a few drawings for it, a woman with a bag of coals on her head, with a yard in the background—a silhouette of roofs and chimneys and a woman at the wash-tub.

You needn't be afraid of my taking any other steps for the present than making the drawings themselves. I must wait till I have some cash before I try any more experiments in lithography. But I think there is something in it.

At times I feel a great longing to be in London again. I should so much love to know more about printing and woodcuts.

I feel a power in me which I must develop, a fire that I may not quench, but must keep ablaze, though I do not know to what result it will lead me, and shouldn't wonder if it were a gloomy one. In times like these what must one wish? What is relatively the happiest fate?

In some circumstances it is better to be the conquered than the conqueror, for instance, better to be Prometheus than Jupiter. Well, it is an old saying, "let come what come may."

To change the subject, do you know whose work has impressed me deeply? I saw reproductions by *Julien Dupré* (is this a son of Jules Dupré?). One represented two mowers, the other a beautiful large woodcut from the *Mondé Illustré*, a peasant woman taking a cow into the meadow.

It seemed to me excellent work, very energetic and faithfully done. It resembles, for instance, Pierre Billet perhaps or Butin.

I saw also different figures by Dagnan Bouveret, a beggar, a wedding, "The Accident," "The Garden of the Tuileries."

I think these two are fellows who wrestle man to man with nature, fellows who do not flag and who have an iron grip. You wrote me about "The Accident" some time ago; now I know it and think it very beautiful. Perhaps they do not possess the sublime, almost religious, emotion of Millet, at least not in the same degree as Millet himself, perhaps they do not feel the same full warm love as he, but still how excellent they are. It is true I know them only by reproductions, but I think there can be nothing in them that was not laid down in the original work. A propos it took a long time before I could admire Thomas Faed's work, but at present I do not hesitate any more about it, for instance, the "Sunday in the Backwoods of Canada," "Home and the

Homeless," "Worn out," "The Poor," "The Poor Man's Friend," in short, you know the series published by Graves.

To-day I have been working at old drawings from Etten, because I saw in the fields the pollard-willows again in the same leafless condition, and it reminded me of what I saw last year. Sometimes I have such a longing to make landscape, just as I crave a long walk to refresh myself, and in all nature, for instance in trees, I see expression and soul as it were. A row of pollarded willows sometimes resembles a procession of almshouse men. Young corn has something inexpressibly pure and tender about it which awakens the same emotion as the expression of a sleeping baby for instance.

The trodden grass at the roadside looks tired and dusty like the people of the slums. A few days ago, when it had been snowing, I saw a group of white cabbages standing frozen and benumbed, that reminded me of a group of women in their thin petticoats and old shawls which I had seen early in the morning standing near a coffee stall.

In regard to those figures I have spoken about which I should like to lithograph, I think the greatest difficulty will be to find about thirty that form together a whole. One must draw a great many more than thirty to get them.

If first I have those, reproduction is a second step, which is perhaps then easier than if one begins to reproduce before the whole is finished. Perhaps, or rather certainly, you will have been here before I have them all, and then we can speak further about it.

Something like it has been done here for the primary schools, viz. 24 lithographs by Schmidt Crans which I saw lately. There are a few among them that are good, but you will understand from the person who made them that the whole is rather insipid. It seems however that they are eagerly used at the schools, but what a pity that just for instruction they are already satisfied with such things. Well, it is with that as with all other things.

But, boy, don't forget to read *Le Nabob*, it is splendid. One might call that figure a *virtuous scoundrel*. Do they really exist? I certainly think so. There is much heart in those books by Daudet, for instance, in *Les Rois en Exil*, that figure of the queen, "aux yeux d'aiguemarine."

Write again soon.



When one is in a sombre mood how good it is to walk on the barren beach and to look on the greyish green sea with the long white streaks of the waves. But if one feels the need of something grand, something infinite, something that makes one feel aware of God, one need not go far to find it. Methought I saw something deeper, more infinite, more eternal than the ocean in the expression of the eyes of a little baby when it awakes in the morning, and coos or laughs because it sees the sun shine in its cradle. If there is a "rayon d'en haut," perhaps one can find it there.

Adieu, boy, with a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Waiting for further information regarding the process, I have, with the help of Smulders' printer, made a lithograph of which I have the pleasure of sending you the very first print.

I have drawn this lithograph on a piece of prepared paper, probably the same as that which Buhot spoke about to you.

Meanwhile, I long very much to compare that paper of the *Vie Moderne* with that which I bought from Smulders. That of S. is very expensive, fr. 1.75 a sheet, but it is pleasant to work on.

You see I scratched this page as simply as possible. I shall be quite satisfied if there is in it some reminder of the old lithographs from the period when there was in general more enthusiasm for this branch of art than there is now.

For five guilders I can get a hundred prints, and for a little more the stone becomes my property.

Is this worth while, do you think? I should love to make more of them. For instance, a series of about thirty figures.

But in the matter of printing, I must first know your opinion.

But this is what I should like: if we could show, without intermediary of a third, a series of about thirty pages not niggled but *sabré*, which we had printed at our own expense, this would give us more prestige in the eyes of the people, whom we shall need afterwards, viz. the managers of the magazines. But you



see more clearly in business than I do, and some time we will talk it over together.

Do try to give me all the information you can about the process. On what must one work with autographic ink? Can everything be printed that is drawn with autographic ink? etc.

There is my model coming, a sweeper from the Bezuidenhout, so with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

If at all possible do not send me the money later than the tenth, for I have had some extra expenses for one thing and another.

I add a few words to this letter.

I think Buhot, for instance, will be able to tell you more clearly something effective about the technique, with this page in hand.

Wouldn't it be great if this proved a success. But for me what weighs a hundred times more than the process is the drawings themselves. I work with the model to the limit of my purse. For you understand one must have ammunition in the form of studies, if one once starts illustrating and wants to continue it in the long run. And from that more important things follow. So I cannot put enough stress on this: it is of *more* importance to me to have a supply of drawings on hand than to hurry to get employment, though such would be quite welcome to me.

But if they do not accept them readily, well, there is nothing lost, and I think that afterwards with a greater provision of drawings, I shall get better results.

Also for this reason that I shouldn't wonder if the need of draughtsmen became more and more evident.

I am very sorry that I have not known this process before. When I was in Brussels, I tried then to get employment with some lithographer, but was everywhere rebuffed. I asked there for other work than this, and my aim was only to see something of lithography and especially to learn. But they didn't want people like that.

Simmonneau and Fouvey were the least unwilling. They said that the young men they had tried to instruct had given them little satisfaction, and business was so slack that they had employees enough. I still mentioned the lithographs of de Groux and Rops,

and they said: yes, but such draughtsmen did not exist any more. The impression I received there and in other establishments was that lithography was clearly dying out.

However, this new invention proves that they try to revive it.

What beautiful things have been made in lithography, Charlet, Raffet, Lemud, besides the others about which we recently spoke.

Last night I looked over the Gavarni's with new pleasure.

I hope you see from this specimen that I feel great animation to try my best to make something.

I wrote you, didn't I, how I came to make this as a result of my telling Smulders what you wrote me about that paper, and his saying that he still had some of it in stock?

He seemed rather astonished when a few hours after I bought it I came back with a drawing.

Do you want another copy with a broader margin?

I have just finished drawing two diggers.

If this size were too large—but I hardly think so—as it is rather vigorously drawn, I would, but I must first know the way to wipe out something on that paper, be able to reduce them  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{1}{3}$  without losing accuracy, viz. by means of quadrangles.

Well, we'll see to this.

At the same time you see in this page one of the studies of which I have several and about which I wrote you.

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Dear Theo,

Tuesday.

Just a word to ask you whether you have received my last letter as well as a little roll also sent by mail containing a proof of a lithograph.

The reason that I involuntarily begin to suspect that it didn't reach you but got lost, or that your letter got lost, is that I haven't heard from you since then, and besides it is to-day already the 14th of November. For the last five or six days I am literally without money, and in consequence I cannot go on with my work, at least not as I should wish.

I think the reason is that you want to send me, together with

your letter and the money, the information I asked you for about the lithographic process and the autographic ink, and that you had to wait for it.

And I hope perhaps to-day it will be cleared up in this way.

But on the other hand I'm always nervous when something like this happens and feel anxious, and then I am afraid of having written or done something of which you do not approve. So, last night I worried about it, that perhaps you didn't approve of my having had my lithograph printed, that perhaps you would draw the conclusion from my letter that I intended to publish my work, or anything like that. Well, I worried whether something had happened. But probably there is nothing wrong. For all security, however, I will tell you that you must not confuse publications with experiments made to learn a process.

The first, viz. publications, are things about which I should certainly consult you before I undertook them, and for the present, I do not think about it, and besides as you know, I only busy myself with the drawings and the artistic part of the work, that's all. To this, however, certainly belong these experiments I make, and it is quite natural that I work on them.

Rappard, for instance, some time ago made experiments in the same way with etchings, which also had to be printed, but the printing that an artist does is not publishing or has nothing to do with business, and is quite a private affair. This seems to me as clear as daylight, but, as I told you, last night (as I had not received a letter from you) I was worrying about it, lest that you might take it for quite a different kind of action.

Well, I hope it will soon become evident that I had no need to worry. I hope, on the contrary, that you succeeded in getting information about the same matter, viz. that you can tell me something about the processes.

On what was left to me of the printing paper, I made another trial last week with the little figure "Sorrow." When I said just now in relation to my former letter I was afraid you would suspect something that was not my intention, the reason of this is that I remembered having said something like the following, "this is what I should like, that we had some of these pages printed on our own account, this would give us more prestige with the managers of the magazines."

Now, my idea about this is by no means that at the same time as we might undertake the printing on our own account, either you or I should take upon himself the handling of the business part. I did not or do not think of that for a moment. I only think that when one introduces oneself to ask for a job, it is well to have some work to show. It saves words and is more practical.

I don't think it improbable but that some time I shall make things that will come into the hands of the public, but it leaves me rather cool and I don't consider it at all a pleasure.

Two reasons would force me to it, in the first place if I became employed by a magazine, then of course I should have to make what it requires; in the second place something that comes later, but I certainly think about it already, if sooner or later I should have something that forms a whole and has a purpose and some interest I would certainly publish it, but never without consulting you or letting you know, and only if I could not find some one to do it for me.

Such a thing would probably rather cost me money than bring money in; it would be for the sake of art and not chiefly for the sake of my own profit. If ever I did so, I would let you know everything, and in no respect, neither as to the work nor as to the publication, would it be dishonest—otherwise of course I would not do it.

So, if there were anything that you might take as a step undertaken by me towards publication (I don't suppose there is, but in my nervousness as I could find no other reason, I thought of that sentence in my letter), be assured this means nothing but experiments which everybody who etches or lithographs or in some way or other reproduces his drawings, *must* take, in order to learn the process, and the strength of black and white. If some page or other that succeeds is printed by the maker in a certain number of copies, it would be at least for me, and for most artists who do such a thing, something of absolute artistic value and without any relation to publication of a business kind. If I didn't know by experience that misunderstandings may arise about matters such as showing drawings (and the showing of printed copies is of the same kind), and such is often considered as conceit, it would never have entered my head. Now as to the non-arrival of your letter, I must tell you that when I think of all your faithfulness,

I am sure it probably has nothing to do with that matter, and there must be some other reason for it.

When I used the above-quoted sentence in my former letter, you will some day see my intentions more clearly from my drawings. In print (because of the lithographic chalk) they are all, especially "Sorrow," much stronger than in the drawing. And just because the originals are kept grey and sober, I have only to follow my study to get the force in my lithograph. And this is something which I would have to point out to the people with whom I might get in touch if I could get some work for a magazine. Well, if you have not written, do so at once when you receive this. For I am rather hard up. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

245

Dear Theo,

To-day I received your letter, for which many thanks. Bitterly though I regret that your letter of the 9th of November and the enclosed bill got lost, still I was glad there was no other reason for the non-arrival of your letter. For I can assure you I was awfully anxious. I at once notified the post office of the loss of the letter, but they could give little hope, and the inquiries must be made in Paris. Meanwhile they also would investigate. Let us hope it will be found, but I dare not count on it, and I fear the 50 francs are to the devil, just at the moment when they are almost indispensable to me. In the first place, to make progress in the experiments with lithography; I am very glad that you liked those which I sent first; by the same mail you will receive the *very first* print of "Sorrow." I added another one with larger margin for Heyerdahl, and another one for Buhot, but as they are larger, I do not know if the post office will accept them.

You can of course take the one you like best and get as many copies as you like, but the very first I marked as a trial copy.

To-morrow I shall go to Smulders to get the stones from him. I can tell you I should like it enormously if I could succeed in making a fine series.

I am now busy drawing diggers, which I hope will lead to something.

It's very cold here, snow and frost, but very beautiful. In the roll of lithographs you will find a little drawing made with neutral tint on Whatman. What I want to ask about it is this, would a drawing made in this way be fit for reproduction? And then, would such drawings made with autographic ink be acceptable for the *Vie Moderne*?

I should like to ask you to send me some numbers of the *Vie Moderne*, for I have very few (I believe just three pages from a very old number) and I should like to form a better and more complete idea of what the magazine really is.

I looked for it here in town but could not find a single copy. The sooner I could receive them, the better it would be, as I am just now trying to find the different processes, and the reproductions in the *Vie Moderne* will perhaps help me to better understand what one can do with it. But I think I have to ask your pardon for all the trouble I cause you about it.

This week father was here just for a moment when he was in town for a meeting.

Rappard writes me about the new series of drawings (of miners) by Paul Renouard in the *Illustration*.

I haven't seen them yet, but if you might find them somewhere in a kiosk where they sell "those things that lie in the South Holland Café," please get them for me, for I think they must be extremely beautiful.

I do not know whether you will think me conceited when I tell you that the following pleased me very much. The workmen of Smulders from the other store on the Laan had seen the stone of the old man from the almshouse and had asked the printer if they could have a copy to hang on the wall.

No result of my work could please me better than that ordinary working people would hang such prints in their room or workshop. For you—the public—it is really done, is a true word by Herkomer.

Of course a drawing must have artistic value, but in my opinion this must not exclude the condition that the man in the street finds something in it. Well, this very first print doesn't count as yet, but I heartily hope it will lead to something more serious.



The loss of those fifty francs (for I fear they are gone) thwarts you as well as me in making those experiments, but don't let us be discouraged.

How I wish you could see the drawings I am making just now. I assure you I was very melancholy when your letter didn't come and I didn't know what was the cause. I shall be pleased to hear, at your early convenience, something about that which I send you to-day. Further, I must remind you that you promised to tell me more about Daumier, also at your early convenience, for I perfectly understand that you do not always have time to write.

Adieu, boy, once more thanks for your letter, and believe me with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

To-night I start reading Zola's *Pot-Bouille*.

246

Dear Theo,

Wednesday morning.

Together with this letter you will receive the first proofs of a lithograph, "A Digger," and of a lithograph of a "Man who Drinks Coffee." I should like to hear as soon as possible what you think of them. I intend still to re-touch them on the stone, and for that I want your opinion about them.

The drawings were better. I had worked hard on them, especially on the digger, now by transferring them on the stone and by printing, several things got lost.

But what I think of these prints is that there is something rough and unconventional in them that I wanted there, and this partly reconciles me to the loss of things that were in the drawing.

The drawing was not done only with lithographic chalk but was touched up with autographic ink. Now the stone has only partly caught that autographic ink, and we do not know to what reason it must be ascribed, probably to the water with which I diluted it.

At all events I have seen from it that where the ink caught, it gives strong black tones with which I hope to get better results

afterwards. Then when the printer has more time, we will make experiments by bringing a kind of wash over it during the printing, and we will try different kinds of paper and different kinds of printing ink.

I hope these two stones will still improve by the re-touch from the two studies made directly from the model which I still have.

At last it has happened that a painter came to see me, namely Van der Weele, who stopped me on the street, and I have also been to see him. I hope he will also try this process of lithography. I wish he would try it with two ploughs which he has—painted studies (a morning and evening effect) and an ox-cart on the heath.

That fellow has many fine things in his studio.

He wanted me to make a composition of my many studies of old men, but I feel I am not ready yet.

You know, I wrote to you about the series of diggers, now you can see a print of them, too.

No news about the letter. Here at the post office they know nothing about it and throw all the fault on Paris.

When your last letter came, having had to wait so long, I had so much to pay at once that little was left. However, I have again made those two experiments in lithography notwithstanding the expenses, because especially in hard times, I see in work the only safety, and I will fight to get ahead.

But to-day or to-morrow all my money will be gone. If it is possible for you to send something, do so,—if not, it is neither your fault nor mine,—but it will be hard days. Well, *quand même*, we must keep heart as long as we can, and not give away to melancholy or weakness. There is a people's paper here called *The Swallow*, published by Elsevier of Rotterdam, backed by the Society for General Welfare. I wondered lately whether they could not use, for instance, such a digger. One page is published monthly.

But it would cost me a trip to Rotterdam, and I am so afraid I would have to go home with the message: Business is too slack, we cannot take anything, etc. Besides, I would much prefer not doing so, I would much rather work longer until I have got a good series together. But as I am so frequently hard up for money, I often think about trying to earn something. *Que faire?*

Even if you don't have the money, boy, do write, for I need your sympathy, which is not worth less to me than the money. I hope you received the roll with lithographs containing "Sorrow" and the letter which accompanied it. I write again to make sure, not because I had already expected an answer.

The weather has been very cold here; to-day it is quite dark, grey and gloomy, but it gives a rough aspect of *non ébarbé* to everything.

Adieu, with best wishes and a handshake in thought, believe me

Always yours,

Vincent.

In the drawing of the "Man who Drinks Coffee," the black has been much more broken by the direction of the hachure. Unfortunately, it has become dull now, but that can perhaps be redressed.

247

Dear Theo,

I received your registered letter of the 20th of November in good order and thank you very much for sending it; from my letter, which must have crossed yours, you will already have seen how welcome it was.

But you write that at the same time as your letter you sent the paper of Buhot, however it did not come at that time, nor up till to-day, Friday, have I received it. Can there again be a mistake at the post office, or did you perhaps forget to send it?

I waited until to-day to answer your letter in order to see whether the postman had delayed delivering it.

I hope you have also received the roll containing the "Digger."

To-day and yesterday I drew two figures of an old man who is sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Long ago Schuitemaker sat for me and I always kept the drawing,<sup>1</sup> because I wanted to make a better one some day. Perhaps I will also make a lithograph of it. How beautiful is such an old workman, with his patched fustian clothes and his bald head.

<sup>1</sup> See letter 150. Vol. I.

I finished Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, the strongest passage I think is the confinement of Adele, the cook (Bretonne pouilleuse), in the dark attic. Jossérand is also drawn confoundedly well and with sentiment like the rest of the figures, but those two sombre ones, Jossérand writing his addresses over night and that servant's attic, impressed me most.

How well constructed the book is, and how bitter the words with which it closes: "aujourd'hui toutes les maisons se valent, l'une ou l'autre c'est la même chose, c'est partout Cochon et Cie." Don't you think Octave Mouret, really the principal figure, can be taken as a type of those persons about whom you recently wrote, if you remember? He is in many respects much better than most of them, however, he will satisfy neither you nor me and I feel shallowness in him. Could he have done otherwise—perhaps he could not, but you and I can and must act differently I think. For we have our roots in another kind of family life than Mouret has, and besides I hope there will always remain in us something of the Brabant fields and heath, which years of city life will not be able to wipe out, the less so as it is renewed and strengthened by art.

He—Octave Mouret—is satisfied when he can readily sell his bales of "nouveau-tés" (déballer des ballots de marchandises sur les trottoirs de Paris), he doesn't seem to have any other aspirations except the conquest of women, and yet he did not really love them, for Zola sees justly, I think, in saying: "où perçait son mépris pour femme."

Well, I do not know what to think of him. He seems to be a product of his time, in reality more passive than active, notwithstanding his activity.

But after the book of Zola, I at last read "Ninety-three" by Victor Hugo. Here we are in quite a different field. It is painted—I mean written—like Decamps or Jules Dupré, with expressions as in the old pictures by Ary Scheffer, for instance "Le Larmoyeur" and "Le Coupeur de Nappe"—or the figures in the background of the "Christ Consolator."

I would strongly advise you to read it if you have not already done so, for the sentiment in which this book is written becomes more and more rare, and among the new things, I really do not find anything more noble.

It is easier to say, as Mesdag did of a certain picture by Heyerdahl, painted in with the same sentiment of Murillo or Rembrandt, which he didn't want to buy from you: "Oh, that's the old manner, we don't need that any longer," than to replace that old manner by something as good, let alone something superior.

And as many people in these days argue in the same way as Mesdag, without thinking much about it, it can do no harm if others reflect whether we are in this world to tear down instead of to build up. The expression, "We don't need that any longer," how readily it is used, and what a stupid and ugly word it is. Andersen, in one of his fairy tales, puts it, I think, not in the mouth of a human being, but in that of an old pig. He who dances must pay the fiddler.

I saw with great pleasure this week in the show-window of Goupil a picture by de Bock which seemed to me much, much better than the one he was working on this spring. It represented a cottage in the dunes with an avenue of trees in front, the background sombre, and in tone with a beautiful light sky over it. There was something grand and cheerful in it.

I said just now that he who dances must pay the fiddler. I'm afraid, Theo, that many who have sacrificed the old for the sake of the new will end by greatly rueing this.

Especially in the domain of art.

There has been a body of painters, authors, artists, in short, who were united, notwithstanding their differences, and they were a force. They did not walk in the dark but possessed this light, that they certainly knew what they wanted and did not doubt. I speak of the time when Corot, Millet, Daubigny, Jacque, Breton, were young, in Holland there were Israëls, Mauve, Maris, etc.

The one supported the other, there was something strong and noble in it. The art-galleries were smaller then; in the studios there was perhaps a greater affluence than now,—as the beautiful things are soon picked out. Those crammed studios, those smaller show-windows, but above all, *la foi de charbonnier* of the artists, their warmth, their fire, their enthusiasm, how sublime they were. Neither you nor I witnessed it exactly, but our love for that period brings us nearer to it. Do not let us forget it, it may be of use,

especially if one continues to say so readily: "we don't want it any more."

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

248

Dear Theo,

Sunday.

Yesterday I happened to read a book by Murger, namely, "*Les Buveurs d'Eau*." I find something in it of the same charm that is, for instance, in the drawings by Nanteuil, Baron, Roqueplan, Tony Johannot, something witty, something bright.

Still, it is very conventional, at least this book is, I think. I haven't read other books of his as yet, and I think there is the same difference between him and, for instance, Alphonse Karr and Souvestre as there is between a Henri Monnier and Comte Calix and the above-mentioned artists. I try to choose the persons I compare all from the same period. It has a fragrance of the time of the bohemian (though the reality of that time is muffled in the book), and for that reason it interests me, but in my opinion it lacks originality and sincerity of sentiment. However, perhaps his books in which no types of painters occur, are better than this one, authors seem to be always unlucky with their types of painters. Balzac, among others (his painters are rather uninteresting), Zola, even though his Claude Lantier is real—there certainly are Claude Lantiers, but, after all, one would like to see another kind of painter depicted by Zola than Lantier, who seems to be drawn from life after somebody who certainly was not the worst of that school, which I think is called impressionistic. And it is not they who form the nucleus of the artistic corps.

On the other hand, I know very few well-drawn or well-painted types of authors, painters on that point generally fall into the conventional and make of an author a man who sits before a table full of papers, that's all, or they do not go even as far as that, and the result is a gentleman with a collar and a face without any definite expression.

There is a painting by Meissonier which I think beautiful, it is



a figure seen from behind, stooping over, with his feet I think on the rung of the easel, one sees nothing but a pair of up-drawn knees, a back, a neck, and the back of a head, and just the glimpse of a fist with a pencil in it. But the fellow is there, and one feels the action of strained attention just as in a certain figure by Rembrandt, where a little fellow sits reading, also crouching with his head leaning on his fist, and one feels at once that he is absolutely lost in his book.



Take Bonnat's Victor Hugo, fine, very fine, but I still prefer the Victor Hugo described in words by Victor Hugo himself, nothing but this: "*Et mio je me taisais, tel que l'on voit se taire un coq sur la bruyère.*"

Isn't it splendid, that little figure on the heath? Isn't it just as vivid as a little general of '93 by Meissonier—of about the size of one centimetre.

There is a portrait of Millet by Millet himself which I love, nothing but a head with a kind of shepherd's cap, but the look—from half-closed eyes, the intense look of a painter—how beautiful it is—also that piercing gleam like a cock's eye, if I may call it so.

It is Sunday again. This morning I took a walk on the Ryswyk road, the meadows are partly flooded, so that there was an effect of tonal green and silver with the rough, black and grey and green trunks and branches of the old trees distorted by the wind in the foreground, a silhouette of the little village with its pointed spire against the clear sky, in the background, here and there a gate or a dunghheap on which a flock of crows sat picking. How you would like such a thing, how well you would paint it if you tried.

It was extraordinarily beautiful this morning, and it did me

good to take a long walk, for what with drawing and the lithography, I had scarcely been outdoors this week.

As to the lithography, I hope to get proof to-morrow of a little old man. I hope it will turn out well. I made it with a kind of chalk especially destined for this process, but I am afraid that after all the common lithographic chalk will prove to be the best, and that I shall be sorry I did not use it.

Well, we must see how it turns out.

To-morrow I hope I shall learn several things about printing which the printer will show me. I should love to learn the printing itself. I think it quite possible that this new method will bring new life into the art of lithography. I think there might be a way of combining the advantages of the new with the old way, one cannot tell for certain, but perhaps it may be the cause of new magazines being published.

Monday.

This far I wrote last night, this morning I had to go to the printing office with my little old man, now I have witnessed everything, the transferring on the stone, the preparing of the stone and the printing itself. And I have a better idea now of what changes I can still make by retouching. Enclosed you will find the first print, not counting one spoiled proof. After a time I hope to do better, this doesn't satisfy me at all, but well, the progress must come by working and trying. It seems to me the duty of a painter to try to put an idea in his work. In this print I have tried to express (but I cannot do it well, or so strikingly as it is in reality, of which this is but a weak reflection in a dark mirror) what seems to me one of the strongest proofs of the existence of "quelque chose la-haut" in which Millet believed, namely, the existence of God and eternity,—certainly in the infinitely touching expression of such a little old man, of which he himself is perhaps unconscious, when he is sitting quietly in his corner by the fire.

At the same time there is something noble, something great that cannot be destined for the worms. Israël has painted it so beautifully. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the most beautiful passage is perhaps that where the poor slave, knowing that he must die,

and sitting for the last time with his wife, remembers the words,

“ Let cares like a wild deluge come,  
And storms of sorrow fall,  
May I but safely reach my home,  
My God, my Heaven, my all.”

This is far from theology, simply a fact that the poorest little wood-cutter or peasant on the heath or miner can have moments of emotion and inspiration which give him a feeling of an eternal home to which he is near.

Returning from the printing office I find your letter, I think your Montmartre splendid, and I certainly would have shared your emotion, in fact I think that Jules Dupré and Daubigny have often tried to raise these thoughts by their work. There is at times something indescribable in those aspects, all nature seems to speak, and on going home one has a feeling as when one has finished a book by Victor Hugo, for instance. As for me, I cannot understand that not everybody sees it and feels it, nature or God does it for everyone who has eyes and ears and a heart to understand. For this reason I think a painter is happy because he is in harmony with nature as soon as he can express a little of what he sees.

And that's a great thing, one knows what one has to do, there are subjects in abundance, and Carlyle rightly says, “ Blessed is he who has found his work.”

If that work like that of Millet, Dupré, Israëls, etc., strives to bring peace, *sursum corda*, lift up your heart to Heaven, then it is doubly stimulating—one is then also less alone, because one thinks. It's true I'm sitting here lonely, but whilst I am sitting here and keep silent, my work perhaps speaks to my friend, and whoever sees it will not suspect me of being heartless.

But I tell you that dissatisfaction about bad work, the failure of things, the difficulties of technique can make one dreadfully melancholy. I can assure you that I am sometimes terribly discouraged when I think of Millet, Israëls, Breton, de Groux, so many others, Herkomer for instance, one only knows what these fellows are worth when one is oneself at work. And then to swallow that despair and that melancholy, to bear with oneself

as one is, not in order to sit down and rest but to struggle on notwithstanding thousands of shortcomings and faults and the doubtfulness of conquering them, all these things are the reason why a painter is not happy either.

The struggle with oneself, the trying to better oneself, the renewal of one's energy, all this is complicated by material difficulties.

That picture by Daumier must be beautiful. It is a mystery why a thing that speaks as clearly as that picture, for instance, is not understood, at least that the situation is so that you are not sure of finding a buyer for it even at a low price.

This is also for many a painter something unbearable, or at least almost unbearable. One wants to be an honest man, one is so, one works as hard as a slave but still one cannot make both ends meet, one must give up the work, there is no chance of carrying it out without spending more on it than one gets back for it, one gets a feeling of guilt, of shortcoming, of not keeping one's promises, one is not honest as one would be if the work were paid for at its natural reasonable price. One is afraid of making friends, one is afraid of moving, like one of the old lepers, one would like to call from afar to the people: Don't come too near me, for intercourse with me brings you sorrow and loss; with all that mountain of care on one's heart, one must set to work with a calm, everyday face, without moving a muscle, live one's ordinary life, get along with the models, with the man who comes for the rent, with everybody in fact. With a cool head, one must keep one hand on the rudder to continue the work, and with the other hand try to do no harm to others.

And then storms arise, things one had not foreseen, one doesn't know what to do, and one has a feeling that one may strike on a rock at any moment.

One cannot present oneself as somebody who comes to propose a good business or who has a plan which will bring great profit. On the contrary, it is clear that it will end with a deficit, and still one feels a power surging within, one has work to do and it must be done.

One would like to speak like the people of '93, this and that must be done, first these have to die, then those, then the last ones, it is duty, so it is evident, and nothing more need be said.

But is it the time to combine and to speak out?

Or is it better as so many have fallen asleep and do not like to be aroused, to try to stick to things one can do alone, for which one alone is liable and responsible, so that those who sleep may go on sleeping and resting.

Well, you see that for this once I express more intimate thoughts than usual, you yourself are responsible for it as you did the same.

About you I think this, you are certainly one of the watchers, not one of the sleepers, wouldn't you rather watch while painting than while selling pictures; I say this in all coolness without adding what in my opinion would be preferable, and with full confidence in your own insight into things. That there is a great chance of going under in the struggle, that a painter is something like a *sentinelle perdue*, these and other things, *cela va sans dire*. You must not think of me as so very much afraid,—for instance, to paint the Borinage would be something so difficult, so relatively dangerous even as to make life a thing far removed from any rest or pleasure. Yet I would undertake it if I could, that is, if I didn't know for sure, as I do now, that the expenses would surpass my means. If I could find people who would interest themselves in such an enterprise, I would risk it. But just because you are really the only one for the moment who looks after what I do, the thing is put on the shelf for the present and must remain there, and meanwhile I will find other things to do. But I do not give it up to spare myself.

I hope you will be able to send the money not later than the 1st of December. Well, boy, hearty thanks for your letter and a warm handshake in thought, believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

249

Dear Theo,

A few days ago I received a letter from Rappard with whom I correspond about the experiments in lithography, and who also makes some trials himself.

I had incidentally written him, "I have had another obstacle, a letter with money which was chiefly intended for these experiments, got lost."



In answer to this, he writes: "Don't let this trouble you and count on me if you cannot continue or if you need something." I had not written it to him expecting him to say such a thing, but because I wanted him, for his part, to make a few more experiments. Still, it pleased me, because such proofs of sympathy are rare. I wrote him in answer: For the moment there is no need for it, but if it really became a question of my not being able to continue, I would accept your aid. And I told him how highly I appreciated it. You see now that is one of the cases about which I wrote you in my former letter.

Of course the drawing, the stone, the printing, the paper, cause expenses, but, relatively speaking, they are small. Such pages as the last one I sent you, for instance, as well as a new one I finished last night and which is ready would I think be perfectly fit for a popular edition, which is so very, very necessary, especially here in Holland more than anywhere else.

Now, such an enterprise as would be the drawing and printing of a series of, for instance, thirty pages of types of workmen, a sower, a digger, a wood-cutter, a ploughman, a washwoman, then also a child's cradle or a man from the almshouse—well, the whole immeasurable field lies open, there are plenty of beautiful subjects—may one undertake it or not?—The question goes even deeper still, is it duty, and is it right or is it wrong? That's the question.

If I were a man of means I wouldn't hesitate to decide, I would say: "*en avant et plus vite que ça.*"

But here it is different—may one, must one, can one involve and carry along others whom one needs, without whom one cannot accomplish it, in an enterprise of which the success is doubtful? I wouldn't spare myself. By helping me you have shown that neither do you spare yourself. But others think it both wrong and foolish of you that you have anything to do with me, and my own actions they think much more foolish still, and many who at first were full of goodwill changed their opinion, and their courage and enthusiasm was as short-lived as a bonfire.

In my opinion they are indeed quite wrong, for neither you nor I act foolishly in this matter. The whole thing started a short time ago with a word from you: "I met Buhot who knows a certain way of lithographing about which I will tell you more after-



wards, you ought to make some trials on the paper which he will send you." This at first relatively insignificant beginning, has in a short time taken for me the proportion of an affair of more importance.

I see in it that with persistence and perseverance it might become something that wouldn't be at all superfluous, but decidedly good and useful.

It has always been said that in Holland we cannot make prints for the people—I have never been able to believe it, I see now it *can* be done.

The Society for General Welfare has supported Elsevier in Rotterdam with thousands of guilders for the publication of *The Swallow*.

Did *The Swallow* become a good thing? *No*, though it had a few beautiful pages, it was too uninteresting, not serious, not powerful, not strong, enough. An imitation from the English, not original enough. There are two systems: How not to do it, and How to do it.

How not to do it was, I am afraid, the underlying motive of Elsevier, otherwise he *would have done it*, even if he had had to pay for it himself. How not to do it argues thus: The Society gave me so and so much, from the sale I have so and so much, *from this I must have for my pocket* so and so much, I must follow the custom of my colleagues, otherwise they call me *mauvais coucheur* or mad dog, etc.

So, instead of saying what was written under a picture by Millais<sup>1</sup> "It might be done and if so, we should do it," Elsevier and thousands of the like say: it can't be done, or they do it with a too flabby hand and without enough energy. I do not know the editors of *The Swallow* well enough to be able to say exactly whose fault it is, however I know their magazine well enough to take upon myself to say: "you have not made it what it might have been, it should and might have been better."

And besides this I say however it may be now, at all times there have also been clever, true, brave, honest Dutchmen, even in times when everything in general was slack and enervated and wrong, the fire was found burning here and there in some hidden corner.

<sup>1</sup> "The North-West Passage." Now in the National Gallery of British Art [Tate Gallery] Millbank. Edward Trelawny, Shelley's friend, sat for it. The actual words used by Millais under this picture are paraphrased by Vincent.

How much more so in those periods when the Dutch people were ranked among the first and best. So, what is needed is courage and self-sacrifice and risking something that must not be done for gain but because it is useful and good, one must keep one's trust in one's fellow-creatures and fellow-countrymen in general. Before I go further, however, I want to state this, I personally will have nothing to do with the matter of prints for the people except the making of them, in case such a thing might be undertaken. It must be a benevolent affair, not a commercial question.

And, as it is necessary however to come into some contact with the "book-trade" if only about the printing or so, for once I speak to you about it, not in order to ask: "Do you think it would be a success?" from their point of view, but only with the question: how to do it.

I should think the following would be the best way: as it is useful and necessary that Dutch drawings are made, printed, and spread, destined for the houses of workmen, and for farms, in a word for every working man, a few persons should unite in order to use their full strength for this end.

This Society must try to operate as practically and well as possible, and should not be dissolved before the work is finished.

The price of the prints must not be more than ten, at the most fifteen, cents.

The publication will start when a series of thirty has been made and printed and when the expenses for stones, wages and paper have been paid.

Those thirty pages will be published together, but can be bought separately, they will form a whole in a linen cover with a short text not referring to the drawings, which speak for themselves, but to explain in a few strong and vigorous words how and why they are made, etc.

The reason for this Society is the following. If the draughtsmen had to stand for it alone, they would have to bear everything, the work as well as the expenses, the undertaking would be a failure before it was half finished, so the burden must be equally divided, so that every one has his share to carry and the thing may be carried out.

The profits of the sale will serve in the first place to pay back the money to those who have furnished it, and in the second

place, to pay each draughtsman an equal sum, to be fixed afterwards.

These things being settled, the rest is used for new publications to continue the work.

They who begin this work consider it a duty. Self-profit *not* being their aim, neither the moneylenders nor the draughtsmen nor anyone who may have contributed to it, may reclaim what they have put into it, if the undertaking doesn't pay, so that the deposits are lost, neither may they claim more than they furnished should the undertaking succeed above all expectation.

In the latter case, the surplus will be used for the continuation of the work, in the former case the founders of the Society will keep the stones, from which *at all events* the first seven hundred copies will be reserved, not for the Society but for the public, if the Society fails, those copies must be spread gratis. Immediately after the publication of the first series of thirty, a consultation must be held and it must be decided upon whether to continue or not, and then, but not before, he who wants to retire from the Society may do so.

This is the idea formed within me, and now I tell you: How to do it. Will you join us?

I didn't speak to others about it because the idea only became clear to me while at work. But that question of prints for the people, I have already been discussing for a long time with Rappard, in so far as he as well as myself is interested in it, so that, as I already told you, he of his own accord says to me: I will give you a helping hand.

However Rappard does not think about the matter as I wish he would, that is, he doesn't agree with me about questions of technique. About his proposal to lend me money, I resolved this: I refuse it for myself personally, because I should only want it, if such a Society, of which I wrote you, could not be established, then I should try to carry out the idea myself. Once as far as that, I have to see what I could do further. For the present I tell him my ideas about the matter, and ask him as I do you: could we not take such a thing in hand?

And I, for myself, should wish that in that Society everybody should be quite equal, no rules or president or such thing, only a note regulating the matter, which once definitely drawn up and signed by the founders, can only be changed by a unanimous vote, further, the names of those who pledged themselves (*but these are*

*not to be made public, the whole thing being an artistic, a private undertaking*), adding in what way they contribute. A pledges himself to make this or that, B gives so much for it, etc., that's all.

Meanwhile it is the 1st of December. If you have not written already do so as soon as possible for I have not a cent left.

Adieu, believe me with a hearty handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

It ought to be a Society which *acts* not deliberates, acts quickly and firmly, and without loss of time considering the whole matter a question of benevolence, not a commercial speculation.

Another thing. One must reckon the expenses beforehand; thirty stones, printing wages, paper, how much would it be, I do not know exactly, but I think that 300 guilders would cover a great deal. The drawings are the contribution of members who cannot give any money. I will take them all upon myself if there is nobody else. But I would rather that better artists than myself took it upon themselves.

I think in any case it is desirable to bring the first thirty pages before the public, and I should like to see this through, even though for the present no other contributors should present themselves to make the drawings. Because by showing the series to artists who could do it better than I may hope to do they might perhaps be induced to join. Many people will begin only when they know for sure that the undertaking is serious and refuse to have anything to do with it as long as the first steps are not taken.

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Dear Theo,

My hearty thanks for your registered letter as well as for the little roll. I found in it the paper of Buhot, but I should like to have some explanation with it, for instance, *with what* must one draw on this paper? Perhaps you will tell me that later.

Renouard's "Enfants Assistés" are splendid, also his new drawing, "Banc des Accusés," though the latter is less important than, for instance, his large prints of the "Prison Mazas." I am very glad to have them and thank you heartily.

You will have received a copy of a lithograph. Frankly speaking, it was a misprint, but I sent it to you because there were a few parts in it that were exactly as I intended the whole to be.

This time the autographic ink blotted badly and it had to be remedied afterwards, and everywhere there remained black parts. But look, for instance, at that left leg with the muddy shoe. This proves that this process can express material and can give peculiar effects. The hands and the head are bad, but in the print of the other old man they formed again the best parts. *Again* I witnessed the transferring on the stone and the printing, and I must tell you that I think great things can be done with this process.

To-day I was at Van der Weele's, who was rather pleased with the little old man with his head in his hands, and he intends to try it himself.

He sometimes makes wonderful things. He gave me four of his etchings, a sheepfold, calves in the underbrush, two sand wagons and an ox plough, and I hope to get some more afterwards when he has new prints made of them. Yesterday I received a letter, not from Rappard but from his father who tells me R. is ill. I do not know what ails him, perhaps, perhaps, it is what you and I know also.

I think this from some expression of his last letter, when he told me to continue the lithography experiments and that he himself felt so down that he couldn't do anything. What a pity isn't it, it is so hard when one has to give up the work for such a foolish reason as indisposition.

If I do not soon get tidings of his recovery, I have a good mind to go and see him. Of late we have rather frequently corresponded about the work, he has become quite enthusiastic about collecting woodcuts, for instance, and I think it quite possible that we shall become more and more interested in each other.

At van der Weele's I saw an excellent sketch of Breitner's, an unfinished drawing, perhaps it cannot be finished, it represented officers before an open window bent over and deliberating about some map or plan of battle. Breitner has really got a position at the high school in Rotterdam, a lucky thing for him. But I think it is after all preferable if one *can* manage to do without such posts and give all one's time to one's work. There seems to be something fatal in occupying such positions, perhaps it is the very cares,



the very dark shadowy side of the artist's life which is the best of it, it is risky to say so, and there are moments when one speaks differently, many perish by too heavy cares, but those who struggle through will be the gainers afterwards.

You write about the question of making drawings in smaller size, I appreciate your speaking of that matter more calmly than others, who have said to me the same thing in quite a different way, and told me: if you do not work in a smaller size, this and that will happen. I think it preposterous and superficial to speak of it in that way, and I cannot believe what they say to be true.

Do you know what I think about it? All sizes have their advantages and disadvantages, in general for my own study I decidedly need the figure of rather large proportions so that the head, hands and feet will not be too small and one can draw them firmly.

So for my own practice I take as an example the size of the *Exercices au Fusain* by Bargue, as one can easily take in that size with one glance and yet the details are not too small.

But most people take a smaller size. From the very beginning I have done it this way, now a little smaller, then a little larger, and I would act against my conviction if for my own study I deviated from it.

But though this is for me the centre on which my attention is fixed—to draw the human figure on a good large scale—a thing that is exceedingly difficult, I assure you, this doesn't mean to say that I am absolutely bound to it. And so in answer to what you write to me, I put you a question: Have you a certain work in view, has anybody told you something, as, for instance, if those figures were half the size, these drawings might be used for this or that? And if you know something or other about such a thing I for my part should take the trouble either to reduce to half-size the figures I have already, or to draw new ones in smaller size.

Without a definite reason I would think it of less importance than with a definite one.

If I send you a few figures, for instance, half the size of the former ones, and you should try to show them, though unable to tell me quite yet to whom or to what end, that would be reason enough for me to make them.

What I said just now is only to show you how from the very



beginning I have tried to keep some system in my work, have set a kind of rule for myself, not to become the slave of that rule but because it helps one to think more clearly.

The reduction of a certain figure to half-size, for instance, is not at all difficult, sometimes, however, it loses something of the essential, sometimes too the figure gains by it.

At all events, I'll send you a few before long, but if you have something definite in view, tell me what it is, that may help me in the choice of my figures. Once more thanks for what you sent. What I wrote you in my former letter about the plan of publishing prints for the people is a thing I hope you will sometimes consider. I myself have no fixed plan about it yet, in so far as in order to have it clearly before me I have things to do in connection with the drawings themselves and in connection with the process of reproduction.

But I have no doubt of the possibility of doing such a thing, neither of its usefulness, neither can I doubt the possibility of finding people who would feel for it. Well, I think it might be done in such a way that no one would repent having contributed to it.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Whilst I am writing to you I read once more your last letter, especially what you say about the size, I will give you an example of an artist whom you know, Theophile Schuler, who illustrated the work of Erckmann-Chatrian. From those small illustrations one sees clearly that he could work very well in a small size, though one sees it better still from the things he made at the time for *Illustration* and *Magasin Pittoresque*, among others, the *Album des Vosges* to which Brion and Jundt also contributed.

I think, however, that one would be very much mistaken in believing that such a thing as, for instance, the print "Le Bénédicité" (a family of wood-cutters and farmers at table) was made in one fell swoop. No, the solidity and pith of the small size is in most cases only acquired by much more serious study than is supposed by those who think lightly of the work of illustrating. Oh, lad, you are one of the best informed among the art dealers I know, and you speak about it with so much more truth and feeling than most

of them, but if you knew the drudgery those little things have cost—as, for instance, the prints from the *Album des Vosges* or those first things from the *Graphic*—I think you would be struck by it.

With me at least it is so that whenever I learn more about the life and works of people like Schuler, Lançon, Renouard, and so many others, I perceive that what is seen of them is only a little cloud of smoke that blows out of their chimney, and within their hearts and studio there is a big fire.

With the illustration work of an artist it is as with a little church spire in the distance, it looks small and insignificant, and coming nearer it proves quite an imposing edifice, I mean only a small part of their work comes before the public.

Well, with some pictures it is so that in their enormous frames they make a big show and afterwards one is astonished that they leave such an empty unsatisfied feeling, while in contrast to this some simple woodcut or lithograph or etching is sometimes overlooked, but one comes back to it and feels more and more attached to it, and feels something grand in it.

I know a drawing by Tenniel representing “Two Dominics” (of course that is not the English title but it is the subject), the one is a city dominie, large, pompous and imposing, the other is rather shabby, a simple village curate, apparently the father of a large and poor family. I often think that among the painters too one finds those two types, and many illustrators belong to the village clergymen among the painters, while perhaps persons like Bouguereau and Makart and many others rather belong to the former type.

Whether I personally have to work on a large or small scale is relatively indifferent to me, but what the illustrations demand is only a part of what I ask of myself. Of myself I decidedly demand that I can draw a figure of such a size so that head, hands and feet become not too small and the details remain distinct.

I cannot do this nearly as well as I have set myself to do, and for that very reason I may not relax on that point.

If I exact this, I require from myself no more than many others do. So, for instance, about that series of drawings I now have on hand I do not know what the definite form or size will be. After long reflection, I decided on the size of that little old man with his head in his hands, but when it comes to printing I can of course reduce the size of these cartoons.

And the practical reason for drawing the figures rather on a large scale, is proved, for instance, by the *Exercices au Fusain, de Modèles d'après les Maîtres*, published by Goupil and Co. I started with them and up till now I have found no better guide to studies from the living model. This publication was intended to bring healthy ideas about study both in the schools and especially in the studio. I have listened to what Bargue says in his examples; though my work is not by far as beautiful as his, I believe they indicate a straight road in keeping with what other artists, among others Leonardo da Vinci, have taught before, and at all events it gave me a certain method in my ideas about drawing, which makes the work more regular than it would be if one put no method in one's work. You see this is a thing which I may not let go, but I repeat as to the size of any figure among my studies, I can reduce it if desirable.

I must say I long very much for you to see all the things together that I made since last summer. How about those drawings which you wrote me you sent via the Rue Chaptal. I have not received them yet, but I suppose they are still with you, because very shortly after that you wrote me that Buhot had seen some of them. Of course I am in no direct hurry for them and only ask about it in case they were left behind somewhere. And if you think it better to keep them with you to show them sometime or other to somebody, I have nothing against it, but that I wish you could make perhaps a new choice out of the whole collection.

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Dear Theo,

You have received my letter in which I wrote you how during my work the idea developed itself of making figures *from the people for the people*. How it seemed to me that it would be a good thing, not commercially but of charity and duty if a few persons combined to do it.

Since I wrote that to you I have been thinking, not of course: who shall do it? but: what am I doing towards it? for the simple reason that for the first I am not responsible but for the second I am indeed. But this much I can tell you, all the time that I was drawing with that purpose in view the idea got more hold on me.

That it would be useful to bring about such a thing and that one need not at all fall into a kind of imitation of other publications for the people, but, on the contrary, the existence of such papers as, for instance, the *British Workman*, can be a guide in showing how to do it and how not to do it.

I do not know if you have read *Little Dorrit* by Dickens and if you remember in it the figure of Doyce, the man one could take as a type of those whose principle is how to do it. Even if you do not know that splendid workman's figure from the book, you will understand the fellow's character from this one phrase. When the thing he wanted to bring about was checked by indifference and worse things, and he couldn't go on, he simply said: "This misfortune alters nothing, the thing is just as true *now* (after the failure) as it was *then*" (before the failure). And what had failed in England he began again on the Continent and succeeded there.

What I wanted to say is this. The idea of drawing types of workmen from the people for the people, to spread them in a popular edition, taking the whole as an affair of love and charity, that and nothing else but that, look here, that idea is such that I believe even if it didn't succeed at once one might admit.

"The thing is as true to-day as it was yesterday and will be as true to-morrow."

And so it is a thing which one can begin and continue with serenity, a thing the good success of which one need not doubt or despair of—if one only doesn't relax or lose one's courage.

I have said to myself that the duty that comes first to me is to try my very best on the drawings. So that since my last letter on the subject I have now made a few new ones. In the first place, a Sower. A big old fellow with tall dark silhouette against a dark ground. Far away in the distance a little cottage with a moss-grown roof and a bit of sky with a lark. The man is a kind of cock type, a clean-shaven face, rather a sharp nose and chin, small eyes and sunken mouth. Long legs with top-boots. Then a second Sower, with a light brown fustian jacket and trousers, so this figure stands out light against the black field, bordered by a little row of pollard willows.

This is quite a different type, with a clipped beard, broad shoulders, rather thick-set, somewhat like an ox, in this respect, that his whole frame has been shaped by his labour in the fields.

Perhaps more the type of an Eskimo, thick lips, broad nose: then a Mower with a large scythe on a meadow. The head with a brown woollen cap stands out against the clear sky.

Then one of those little old fellows in short jacket and high old top-hat, which one meets sometimes in the dunes. He carries home a basketful of peat.

Now in these drawings I have tried to show my meaning still more clearly than in the old man with his head in his hands. These fellows are all in action and that fact especially must be kept in mind in the choice of subjects, I think. You know yourself how beautiful are the numerous figures in rest which are made so very very often. They are made more often than figures in action.

It is always very tempting to draw a figure at rest; to express action is very difficult, and the former effect is in many people's eyes more "pleasant" than anything else.

But this "pleasant" aspect may not take from the truth, and the truth is that there is more drudgery than rest in life. So you see my idea about it all is especially this, that I for my part try to work for the truth.

It seems to me that the drawings themselves are more urgent than even the reproduction.

I will also be chary in speaking about the matter, as I believe that a small circle of persons often act more practically than when too many meddle with it. Too many cooks spoil the broth.

How I wish we could be more together. Do you know why I do not doubt that I should be able to do it? You know from physics that an object immersed in a liquid loses as much in weight as the specific weight of the volume of liquid displaced by the object. That is the reason why some objects float and why those which sink are lighter under water than in the air. Something like this—a kind of fixed law of nature—seems to exist in regard to the work in this respect that, being well in it, one feels more energy and power than one was aware of, or rather than one possessed in fact.

You would also experience this if you would take up painting. At first it seems something unobtainable, hopeless, but afterwards things clear up and I think you would see this in my work too.

But something about which I already wrote to you has proved true, namely, that Rappard is seriously ill. I have again tidings



from his father, who doesn't explain what it really is. Against the time of his recovery I want to have as many drawings ready as possible, for I should like Rappard to do the same as soon as he takes up his work again. Rappard has that which not everybody possesses, he reflects and he cultivates his sentiment. He can make a plan, he can grasp a scheme in its entirety, he can fix a thought.

Many others are so that they call reflection and concentration inartistic, at least they are not fit for labour of long duration. Now the subject in question is one both of dexterity and quickness, and of perseverance and calm patience besides. Then Rappard possesses another quality that in my opinion makes him quite valuable for such an enterprise. He decidedly studies the figure, not only as a touch of colour in a water-colour, but more seriously in its form and structure.

I often think that I should like to be able to spend more time on the real landscape!

I often see things which I think splendid and which involuntarily make me say: I have never seen such a thing painted that way. But in order to paint it—how to do it—I should have to neglect other things. I should like to know if you agree with me in this, that in landscape things are left undone, that, for instance, Emile Breton has painted effects (and has continued to work in that direction) which are the beginnings of something new, which seems to me not to have reached its full strength, is understood by few and put in practice by still fewer. Many landscape painters do not possess that intimate knowledge of nature which those have who from childhood on have looked lovingly at the fields. Many landscape painters give something that as men (though we appreciate them as artists) satisfies neither you nor me. They call Emile Breton's work superficial, it is not true, his sentiment is superior to that of many others, he knows much more and his work holds good.

Indeed in the field of landscape enormous gaps begin to show themselves, and I should like to apply to it the word of Herkomer: the interpreters allow their cleverness to mar the dignity of their calling. And I believe the public will begin to say: deliver us from artistic combinations, give us back the simple field.

How much good it does one to see a beautiful Rousseau on which he has drudged to keep it true and honest. How much good it does to think of people like van Goyen, Old Crome and Michel.



How beautiful is Isaac Ostade or a Ruysdael. Do I want them back or do I want people to imitate them? No, but I want the honesty, the naïveté, the truth to remain.

I know old lithographs by Jules Dupré, either by himself or facsimiles of his sketches, but what pith and what love is in them, and yet how freely and merrily are they done.

The real thing is not an absolute copy of nature, but to know nature so well that what one makes is fresh and true, that is what is lacking in many.

Do you suppose, for instance, that de Bock knows what you know, no, very decidedly not. You will say that everybody has seen landscapes and figures from childhood on. The question is: has everybody also been reflective as a child, has everybody who has seen them loved also heath, fields, meadows, woods, and the snow and the rain and the storm? *Not* everybody has done that like you and I, it is a peculiar kind of surroundings and circumstances that must contribute to it, it is a peculiar kind of temperament and character too, which must help to make it take root.

I remember letters from you when you were still in Brussels with such descriptions of landscapes as in your last one. *Do you know that it is so very very necessary for honest people to remain in art?* I do not mean to say that there are not some such, but you feel what I mean and know as well as I do how many people who paint are inveterate liars.

Honesty is the best policy, is applicable here, too, as well as the fable of the hare and the tortoise, as well as the ugly duckling of Andersen.

Edwin Edwards, the etcher, for instance, why is his work so splendid, why is he rightly ranked among the best in England? because what he aims at is faithfulness and truth. I would rather be Jules Dupré than Edwin Edwards, but you see for sincerity we must have a high respect, and it remains where other things fall short. For me Bernier's "Les Champs en Hiver" in the Luxembourg is ideal.

There is Lavielle, the wood engraver and painter, I just remember having seen "A Winter Night" by him with a Christmas sentiment.

There is Mme Collart,—for instance, that picture of an apple orchard with an old white horse.

There is Chintreuil and Goethals (I have often tried to think of somebody, to explain to you with whom the beautiful things of Goethals can be compared. I think it is Chintreuil), but otherwise I haven't seen much of Chintreuil or of Goethals either.

For a great part the cause of the evil lies in the wrong construction put upon the intentions of the great landscape painters. Hardly anyone knows that the secret of beautiful work lies to a great extent in truth and sincere sentiment.

Many people cannot help being not deep enough, and they act in good faith in so far as they possess good faith. But I believe you will agree with me in the fact (the more so because the question here is something that though it concerns you, is relatively not your own doing), that if many a landscape painter who has now quite a reputation, knew half as much as you do of the healthy ideas about nature which seem to come naturally to you, he would produce much better and more sincere work. Think this over, and put this and many other things besides in the scale when weighing yourself you say such things as: "I should only be something mediocre."

Unless you take mediocre in its good noble signification. Smartness, as they call it here, the word is so much used—I myself do not know its real signification and have seen it applied to very insignificant things—smartness, is that what must save art? I would have better hope that things would go all right if there were more people like, for instance, Ed. Frère or Emile Breton, than if there came many smart people like Boldini or Fortuny. Frère and Breton will be missed and mourned. Boldini, Fortuny one may respect them *as men*, but the influence they have had is fatal. A fellow like Gustave Brion has left some good, de Groux for instance also, if many people were like that the world would be the better for it, art would be a blessing, but Boldini, but Fortuny, but even Regnault, how did they help us, what progress did they bring? What you say is quite true: "Piety is better than irony, be it ever so sharp and witty," in other words I should say, "bonté vaut mieux que malice," that is self-evident, but many people say, "No, the maliciousness, that's it." Well, they will have to reap what they sow. Adieu, boy, I wanted to write you about those drawings, namely that I hope that idea of prints for the people will help me to make some progress. While I am writing to

you, there come tidings from Rappard that there is a little change for the better, but he seems to be very ill. I know for sure that he, as well as his father, is interested in those types from the people. As soon as Rappard is up again, or at least as soon as his eyes are normal again, I hope to go and see him.

I write soon again, and believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Just now I received your registered letter and thank you heartily for it. I want to begin with the following. I enclose a page from the *Graphic* Christmas Number of 1882.

Read it attentively, it is worth while.

What a colossal institution, isn't it, what enormous circulation. This much stated, what next? . . . Among others, the following, Hubert Herkomer's words contrast strangely with those of the *Graphic* editors. The letters say: "Referring to our books, we find that *besides our professional artists*, we have no less than two thousand seven hundred and thirty friends scattered over the world, sending us sketches or elaborate drawings." H. Herkomer speaks of a "dearth of good draughtsmen."

And in general his words are exactly the opposite of those of the editors of the Christmas Number in question, the result being this way:

*Graphic* editors say: "All right."

H. Herkomer says: "All wrong."

Now on page four of the paper I sent, you will find something striking: the *Graphic* when strong enough to walk alone rented one house, and began to print with six machines.

For this I have full respect ; here I feel something holy, something noble, something sublime. I look now at that group of great artists and think of foggy London and the bustle in that small workshop. Moreover, I see in my imagination, the draughtsmen in their several studios, starting their work with the best kind of enthusiasm.

I see Millais running to Charles Dickens with the first number of the *Graphic*. Dickens was then at the end of his life, he had a lame foot, and walked with a kind of crutch. Millais says whilst showing him the drawing by Luke Fildes, "Homeless and Hungry," poor people and tramps before a night asylum, Millais said to Dickens, "Give him your *Edwin Drood* to illustrate," and Dickens said "Very well."

*Edwin Drood* was Dickens' last work, and Luke Fildes, brought into contact with Dickens through those small illustrations, enters his room on the day of his death, sees his empty chair standing there, and so it happens that one of the old numbers of the *Graphic* contains that touching drawing: "The Empty Chair."

Empty chairs—there are many of them, there will be still more, and sooner or later in the place of Herkomer, Luke Fildes, Frank Holl, William Small, etc., there will be nothing but empty chairs. And yet the publishers and dealers, not listening to a prophecy like that of H. Herkomer, will continue to assure us in the same terms, as in the enclosed paper, that everything is all right, that we are getting on famously.

But how hard-hearted they are, how mistaken they are, if they think they can make everybody believe that material grandeur outweighs moral grandeur, and that without the latter any good can be accomplished.

As it is with the *Graphic*, it is with many other things in the realm of art.

Moral grandeur diminishes, material grandeur comes in its stead. But will the much desired change come? I think that everybody must find that out for himself, but the old parable speaks of a broad way that leads to destruction, and of a narrow path which led to another result.

The *Graphic* started on the narrow path, has now passed to the broad one. I saw this morning the last number, there was not a *single* good thing in it; from a bundle of waste paper at a book-stall, I took this morning an old dirty torn number of 1873, and *almost everything* in it is worth keeping.

But as to me—I wish to act.

A few years ago I walked with Rappard outside Brussels on a spot which they call la Vallée Josaphat, a neighbourhood where among others Roelofs lives. At that time there was a sand quarry

where diggers were at work, there were women looking for greens, a farmer was sowing, we looked at all that, and I was almost in despair then: "Shall I ever succeed in painting what I admire so much?" Now I am so despairing no longer, now I can hit off those farmers and women better, and working on with patience I can succeed now in what I wanted then. But the way things go oppresses me sorely, and no longer can I think with pleasure and enthusiasm of those magazines. The *Graphic* forgets to say that many from the group of artists refuse to give their work, and retire more and more. Why? because a painter paints to do some good and has some sincerity in his heart that despises all that grandeur. What more shall I say . . . I can only repeat I wish to act.

Of course, continue to work, but with a dark future in sight.

Here at the Hague—there are clever, great men, I readily admit it, but in many respects what a miserable state of affairs, what intrigues, what quarrels, what jealousy. And in the personality of the successful artists who, with Mesdag at their head, give the tone, there certainly is also a substitution of moral grandeur by material grandeur.

I begin to feel that if I went, for instance, to England, if I took steps in all directions I would certainly have a chance of finding a position.

To reach this was my ideal, and, after all, is so still, it was that that urged me on to surmount the enormous first difficulties. But my heart gets heavy at times, when I think of the way things go the pleasure loses its edge. Of course I love to do my best on my drawings, but all those editors, and to present myself there, oh I hate the thought of it!

You ask after my health, that trouble of last summer is really quite gone, but I feel rather depressed at present, while at other moments, when I have some chance with my work, I am quite cheerful, and have a kind of feeling of being a soldier who doesn't feel at home in the guard house, and argues thus to himself: "why must I be in prison here, when I should be much better off in my place among the rank and file?"

I mean I feel depressed because I have a strength in me, which circumstances do not allow to develop as well as might be, with the result that I often feel miserable. A kind of internal struggle



about what I must do. Which is not as easy to solve as might seem at first.

I wish I had a position which would help me to make progress, many positions which might possibly be within my reach would lead me to quite different things than I aim at.

Those are out of my reach, for though I might at first be accepted, they would not be satisfied with me in the long run, they would sack me or I would leave of my own accord as at Goupil's.

I mean they would demand actualities, topics of the day, which people like Adrien, Marie, or Godefroid Durand make to perfection. I begin to see more and more clearly that the magazines drift with the superficial tide and I think they do not aim to be as good as they ought to. No, to fill the magazines with things which cost them neither time nor trouble, to give now and then a good thing, but reproduced in a cheap mechanical way, further, to pocket as much money of it as possible, that is the way they do.

I do not think that method wise. I think it will make them bankrupt, and they will bitterly repent it at the end, which may be far away still, but nevertheless, things are as they are. To renew themselves, they do not think of it. Suppose the *Graphic*, *Illustration*, or *Vie Moderne*, publish a number full of insignificant flat things, yet they will sell it by the car-load, and ship-load, the managers rub their hands, and say: "In this way it goes just as well, who's the wiser, they gulp it down anyhow."

Yes, but if the gentlemen managers could follow up their publications and see how thousands take up the paper greedily, and if they put it down, involuntarily have a feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment, perhaps their frenzy for actualities would somewhat abate.

However, this is by no means the case, and as you see from the report of the *Graphic* they are not lacking in self-confidence.

In the meantime, people push themselves in, as employees, who would never have been accepted in the difficult but noble days. It is what Zola calls "triomphe de la médiocrité." Snobs, nobodies, come in the place of workers, thinkers, artists, and it isn't even noticed.

The public, yes, for one part it is dissatisfied, but material greatness also finds applause, but do not forget that this is but a straw fire and that those who applaud generally do so only because



it has become the fashion. But on the morrow of the banquet, there will be a void, a silence and indifference after all that noise.

The *Graphic* will give "types of beauty" (large heads of women) as this prospectus says, I dare say to take the place of Heads of the people by Herkomer, Small and Ridley.

All right, but some people will not admire the Types of beauty and will remember with melancholy the old Heads of the people (which series has been stopped).

The *Graphic* says they will make *Chromo's*!!! Give us back the studio of Swain.

Look here, Theo boy, it cuts me to the heart, things go wrong. You know I would have counted it the highest honour, an ideal in fact, to contribute to what the *Graphic* started. What Dickens was as an author, what the Household edition of his work was as a publication, something like that was the sublime beginning of the *Graphic*.

And now everything is gone,—once again materialism instead of moral principle. Do you know what I think of the copy which I sent you? It is just like the kind of talk of, for instance, Obach, the manager of Goupil and Co., in London. Yes that has success, *yes that has success, yes that is listened to and that is admired*. Do you know, boy, what I think of this number of the *Graphic*? It is something like Mesdag's talk about his panorama. I respect all kinds of work, I despise neither Obach nor Mesdag, but there are things which I rank infinitely higher than that kind of energy.

I want something more concise, more simple, more serious, I want more soul and more love and more heart.

But that I will not, nor cannot set up a cry against it; that I will not *rebel* against it, you may be sure of it. But it makes me sad, it takes away my pleasure, it upsets me, and for myself I am perfectly at a loss what to do. What sometimes makes me sad is this, formerly when I began, I used to think if I have only made so or so much progress, I will get a position here somewhere, and I will be on a straight road and find my way through life.

But now another thing turns up, and I fear or rather expect, instead of a position, a kind of jail,—I expect such things as: yes, some things in your work are rather good (I doubt if they really mean it) but you see we have no use for such work as you make, we

need actualities (vide *Graphic*, we print *on Saturday* what happened *on Thursday*). Look here, Theo boy, I cannot make "Types of beauty," I do try my best to make "Heads of the people." You know, Theo, I should wish to do work like those who started the *Graphic*, though I do not count myself their equal, namely, I would take a fellow or woman or child from the street, and draw them in my studio,—but no, they would ask me, "Can you make chromo's by electric light?" In short instead of meeting with an opinion, a sentiment, an aim like that of Dickens (for such the *Graphic* originally stood for) one is confronted by a way of thinking like that of Obach. That makes me sad, and then I feel helpless. One can only undertake a thing if one has sympathy and assistance. This now brings me to another matter.

Do not take offence when I write you my thoughts and continue to do so. If you have no time to write, and do not answer at once, you will know at all events, what I have in mind, if we meet again, and perhaps we shall find a practical way.

This number of the *Graphic* is a fact which speaks clearly for itself, and therefore I send it you.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Though I have nothing particular to tell you, I want to write you again. In contrast to what I wrote you that I often feel heavy-hearted about many things, that I cannot see progress in everything, etc., it still is true what I also said on the former occasion, that there are things which it is worth while doing one's utmost upon, because whether people like them or not, they have in themselves a *raison d'être*. Blessed is he who has found his work, says Carlyle, and that is decidedly true.

And as for myself, when I say I want to make types of the people for the people, of course the state of business only indirectly influences me in so far as it makes my work more difficult or more easy, but the making of the drawings themselves takes the largest place in my thought. And so in contrast to a feeling of depression there is the delightful sense of working at something that becomes

more and more interesting the deeper one goes into it. In my last letter I told you I sometimes had a feeling as if I were in some kind of prison, I mean only that I cannot do many things which I should like to do—which would only be possible if I had the money for it,—but I do not mean at all to say that I do not appreciate the present, nor am I discontented, far from it. It is just by doing what is within our reach, that we have a chance of making progress, so be assured whenever you may find work for me on the magazines yonder, I will gladly try my best on it.

When I write: I do not think the illustrated magazines take a straight course, this needn't be a reason for my not being willing to work for them. I am only afraid that they wouldn't like my work, and if this were because of real faults, I would try to correct them, but if it were because of the conception or sentiment in general, I could do very little to change that.

You will have received the drawing on smaller scale, and I repeat once more, if you wish it, I will make a series in that size, just as a trial.

I have two new drawings now, one is a man who reads his Bible, and the other is a man who says grace before his dinner, which stands on the table. Both certainly are done in what you may call an old-fashioned sentiment, they are figures like the little old man with his head in his hands. The "Bénédicté" is, I think, the best, but they complete each other. On the one there is a view through the window over the snowy fields. My intention in these two, and in the first little old man, is one and the same. Namely, to express the peculiar sentiment of Christmas and Old Year. Both in Holland and England this is always more or less religious, in fact so it is everywhere, at least in Brittany and in Alsace too. Now one need not agree exactly with the form of that religious sentiment, but it is a feeling one must respect, if it is sincere. And I, for my part, can fully share it and even need it, at least in this respect, that, just as such a little old man I have a feeling for, and a belief in *quelque chose là-haut*, even though I am not exactly sure *how* or *what* it will be. I think it a splendid saying of Victor Hugo's "les religions passent, mais Dieu demeure," and another beautiful saying of Gavarni is "il s'agit de saisir ce qui ne passe pas, dans ce qui passe."

One of the things "qui ne passeront pas" is the "quelque chose

là-haut " and the belief in God, too, though the forms may change, a change which is just as necessary as the renewal of the leaves in spring. But you understand from this that it was not my intention in this drawing to pay homage to the form, but to show that I highly respect the Christmas and Old Year sentiment.

And if it has got any sentiment or expression, it is because I feel it myself.

The one thing I feel more and more to be very difficult to distinguish is what is the best method of work. There is so much beauty on one side as well as on the other, at the same time so many things wrong that sometimes one doesn't know which path to choose. But at all events work one must. But I myself do not think I cannot make mistakes, I am too conscious of my many errors that I should be able to say this or that is the right manner and this or that the wrong one. That speaks for itself. But I am not indifferent, I think it wrong to be so. I think it one's duty to try to do the right thing, even knowing that one cannot go through life without committing mistakes, without repentance or sorrows. I read somewhere: *Some good must* come by clinging to the right.

How can I know whether I shall reach some goal,—how can I know beforehand whether the difficulties will or will not be overcome?

One must go on working silently, trusting the result to the future. If one prospect is closed, perhaps another opens itself,—some prospect there *must* be and a future too, even if we do not know its geography. Conscience is a man's compass, and though the needle sometimes deviates, though one often perceives irregularities in directing one's course after it, still one must try to follow its direction.

I just want to copy for you something which I had in mind when drawing that little old man, though it is not literally applicable to it, for instance it is not night in the drawing.

#### THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS.

Of in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Fond memory brings the light  
Of other days around me:

The smiles, the tears,  
Of boyhood's years,  
The words of love then spoken;  
The eyes that shone,  
Now dimm'd and gone,  
The cheerful hearts now broken!  
Thus in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,  
Sad memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.

When I remember all  
The friends, so link'd together,  
I've seen around me fall  
Like leaves in wintry weather,  
I feel like one  
Who treads alone  
Some banquet hall deserted,  
Whose lights are fled  
Whose garlands dead,  
And all but he departed!  
Then in the stilly night  
Ere slumber's chain has bound me  
Sad memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.

THOMAS MOORE.

Well, I hope you will enjoy nature somewhat these days, either in the aspect of the short winter days, or of the winter figures. What different people one sees on the street in winter than in summer.

I read your information about the paper of Buhot you sent. If you think it advisable for me to work on it, I should have a few sheets, and I think they might perhaps be just the right size, so that I could adjust my work to them. Here I cannot get that paper, otherwise I would have tried it already. Having read your information, there remains also the question: if one takes a photograph of the drawing, which photograph is afterwards transferred on zinc, are only those drawings fit for it which have been made on

that paper in question, and cannot one reproduce all drawings in black and white, even though they are made on ordinary paper? Further: can the photographer reduce the size, in case the drawing may be larger than is desired for the size of the page?

From some American reproductions in *Scribner's Magazine*, I would infer the latter. Well, adieu, I hope you will write by the 20th.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Your registered letter arrived in good order, many thanks. From your letter I saw that you are very busy with the inventory, good luck with it, it will be a tough job.

How I wish we could be together these two Christmas days—I should so love to see you in the studio again.

I too have been working hard lately, just because I was full of that Christmas sentiment, and the feeling is not enough, one must express it in one's work.

So I am now working on two large heads of an old man from the workhouse, with his wide beard and his old-fashioned, old top-hat. The old fellow has the kind of wrinkled witty face that one should like to have near a cozy Christmas fire.

For Christmas, Harper has published a magazine illustrated by some painters who call themselves the "Tile Club." Boughton is one of them. The best among the drawings are by Abbey,—they are principally scenes from the older time when the Dutch people founded New York under the name of New Amsterdam.

I think these drawings have been reproduced in the process you described on the paper of which Buhot sent a sample. I must compare these American drawings again with the pictures in "Vie Moderne."

I trust I shall be able to learn it, and who knows if next year we shall not be able to make a trial.

While you are so busy just now I'll try my utmost to make some



drawings for that purpose. If after awhile you are less busy, I shall have to ask you or Buhot for some more information about it.

But I see clearly enough that the process is very *satisfactory*, that in case the drawing is good, one is almost sure of a good reproduction. So to work on the drawings is the principal thing.

As to the lithography, as I have assisted a few times at the printing and preparation of the stone, I think I shall try and make some lithographs without any help of paper, etc., simply by drawing on the stone itself. For much as I like those drawings in *Harper's Christmas Number* or in *Vie Moderne*, still there is always something mechanical in them, something of a photograph or a photo engraving, and I prefer an ordinary lithograph by Daumier or Gavarni or Lemud. Well, for the one as well as for the other, a firm hand for drawing is needed and on that it principally depends.

I am afraid that a new process is one of those things which cannot quite satisfy one, that it is in fact rather too smooth. I mean that an ordinary etching, an ordinary woodcut, or an ordinary lithograph has a charm of originality that cannot be substituted by anything mechanical.

The same can be said of engraving—the reproduction in photo-engraving of the Sewing class by Israëls, for instance, or the picture by Blommers or Artz is superb,—as they are published by Goupil and Co. But if this process would have to replace entirely the real engraving, I think in the long run one would miss the ordinary engraving, with all its difficulties and imperfections.

Rappard is still ill, though the crisis is past ; he is very weak his father writes.

What is it? I do not know—perhaps brain fever or inflammation? His father doesn't give particulars.

Well, I hope your Christmas will be pleasant after all,—that you will be able to take a nice long walk, and that you will have a good time, but I am afraid you will be head over heels in the inventory. Well, work is always cheering, even work of a kind which isn't in itself very pleasant.

My very best wishes, write again if you can, but if you are too busy, I understand perfectly, and then you will make up for it afterwards by a few descriptions of Montmartre or so. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Before the year is gone, I feel I have to thank you again for all your help and friendship.

I haven't sent you anything for a long time, but I am saving for the time when you will come here.

I am sorry that I haven't succeeded this year in making a saleable drawing. I really do not know where the fault lies.

I wish you could come to the studio some time. I think I wrote you in my last letter that I am at present drawing large heads, because I felt the need of a more intimate study of the structure of the skull, and the interpretation of the physiognomy. The work absorbs me greatly and I found a few things lately for which I had been seeking a long time. Well, whenever you come, you will see everything.

These days I am troubled with a bad toothache which sometimes affects my right eye and ear, of which perhaps the nerves are also the cause. If one has a toothache, one becomes indifferent towards many things, but it is curious that, for instance, the drawings by Daumier are so good that they almost make one forget the toothache. I have two new reproductions by him, "Un Train de Plaisir," travellers with pale faces and black coats in rough weather arriving too late on the platform, women with crying babies among them.

Do you know the little book "Croquis à la Plume," *written* by the draughtsman Henri Monnier (who invented Mr. Prudhomme)? I read in it the "Journey by Coach," really typical.

You must still be busy with your inventory, and I will not keep you from your work.

My very best wishes for a Happy New Year.

Shall I in the New Year succeed better in making saleable drawings? or in finding some work for an illustrated paper? Of one thing I am sure, wrestling with nature is no idle work, and though I do not know what will be the result, some result there must be.

I wish you could come to the studio again, not because I cannot go on or do not know what to do, but especially because I am so afraid you will think I am not making progress. And though I

cannot show you any definite result, you would see that it slowly develops itself, and you would see that I am aiming high.

I perfectly agree with what you wrote lately: "There comes a time when one has mastered drawing so well that the size makes no difference and one knows the proportions by heart, so that one can work as well on a large as on a small scale." Not only do I agree perfectly with you in this, but besides that, I believe that one must, and can, work till one is master of composition and effects of light and shadow, so that in the sphere one has chosen, one can master the most diverse subjects, for instance to-day draw a first-class waiting-room, to-morrow a rainy day in a poor quarter, another time a workhouse, then again a saloon or a soup kitchen. I am not yet so far,—but perhaps just because I look for the root or origin of many things together, it takes a long time. Thanks for all your faithful friendship, boy, which held me up again this whole year. I wish I on my side could give you some pleasure too. *Sometime I shall succeed in this.*

A handshake in thought. Write to me again if you find a moment. Once more best wishes.

Believe me, yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

It is New Year's Eve and I want another chat with you.

When I wrote my last letter, I spoke to you about some large heads I had on hand.

I was just then busy making an experiment of which I can tell you the first result, as I had models for two drawings, the day before yesterday, yesterday and to-day.

When I made the lithographs it struck me that the lithographic chalk was very pleasant material and I thought, I'll make drawings with it.

There is, however, one drawback which you will understand,—as it is greasy it cannot be erased in the usual way, working on paper with it one even loses the only thing with which one can erase on the stone itself, namely the *grattoir*—which cannot be used strongly enough on the paper because it cuts through it.

But, it occurred to me to make a drawing first with carpenter's pencil and then to work in it and over it with lithographic chalk, which (by reason of the greasiness of the material) fixes the pencil, what ordinary chalk does not do, or at least very badly. Having made a sketch in that way, one can, with a firm hand, work in the lithographic chalk where it is necessary without much hesitation or erasing. So I finished up my drawings pretty well in pencil, indeed as far as possible. Then I fixed them and tarnished them with milk. And then I worked over it again with lithographic chalk where the deepest tones were, retouched them here and there, with a brush or pen, with *noir de bougie* and worked in the lighter parts with white body colour.

In this way I made a drawing of an old man who sits reading, with the light falling on his bald head, on his hand and the book. And the second one, the bandaged head of a wounded man. The model that sat for this really had a wound in his head and a bandage over his left eye. Just a head, for instance, of a soldier of the old guard on the retreat from Russia. When I now compare these two heads with the others I have made, there is a great difference in the power of effect.

So I hope that the drawings made in this way will lend themselves to reproduction by the process which you described to me.

Especially in case the paper sent by you is not absolutely necessary for the reproduction.

And if it is I would get with the same ingredients on this grey paper rather a better than a worse effect. When I looked at what Buhot had scratched on the one sample, I saw at once that the black was of a very deep tone, and I can understand that such is a real necessity for the reproduction where photography and galvanoplastic are used.

So that I began to try at once what kind of black I might use, yet keeping my usual way of sketching.

First I tried it with ink, but that didn't satisfy me, however, I think in that way with the lithographic chalk the results will be better.

Well, I do not write about it to worry you in your busy days, I am in no hurry for it, and am even very glad to have some time for further experiments.

But I write it to you that you may know I am working on it

with heart and soul to get a good and useful result. That which is called Black and White is in fact *to paint in black*, to paint in this respect, that one gives in a drawing the depth of effect, the richness of tone value which must be in a picture.

Some time ago you said rightly that every colourist has his own peculiar scale of colours.

This is also the case in Black and White, and after all it is the same, one must be able to go from the highest light to the deepest shadow, and this with only a few simple ingredients. Some artists have a nervous hand at drawing, which gives to their technique something of the peculiar sound of a violin, for instance, Lemud, Daumier, Lançon,—others, for example, Gavarni and Bodmer, remind one more of piano playing. Do you feel it like this too?—Millet is perhaps a solemn organ.

January 2nd.

This much I wrote on New Year's Eve, I had hoped your letter would come. If you haven't written already, do so now for I haven't a cent left. But you will be very busy, I suppose.

Since then I have made again a few sketches with the lithographic chalk, it makes drawing almost as delightful as painting, and it gives a great vigour and depth of tone. I long very much indeed to see you again. I have so many plans,—all of which will not be realized, I suppose,—but neither will they all be failures, and I want so badly to talk it over with you because I have so little time to think it over, and I am so little in touch with what is in demand that I cannot judge what is practicable.

Please do not let it worry you that I have made nothing saleable this year, you once said the same thing to me, and if I say so now, it is because I see in the future a few things within my reach which I didn't see before. I sometimes think of a year ago when I came here to the Hague. I had imagined that the painters formed a kind of circle or society where warmth and cordiality and a certain kind of harmony reigned. This seemed to me quite natural and I didn't suppose it *could* be different.

Neither should I want to lose the ideas I had about it then, though I must modify them and distinguish between what is and what might be.

I cannot believe it a natural condition that there is so much

coolness and disharmony. What's the reason??? I do not know—and I am not called to investigate it, but I keep to the principle that I, for myself, must avoid two things, the first is that one must not quarrel,—but instead of that, try to promote peace for others as well as for oneself. And the other is, in my opinion, that if one is a painter, one must not try to be something else than a painter in society; as a painter one must avoid other social ambitions and not try to be in the movement with the people who live in the Voorhout, Willemspark, etc.<sup>1</sup> For in the old smoky dark studios there was a cosiness and originality that was infinitely better than what threatens to come in its stead.

When you come here again if you should find some progress in my work I would have no other desire but to go on in the same way as I have done. That is, to continue my work quietly without mixing with anybody else. When there is bread in the house and I have some money in my pocket to pay the models, what more can I want? My pleasure lies in the progress of my work and that absorbs me more and more. Well, boy, if you haven't written already, do so soon, for I am rather hard up. Once more, my best wishes for the New Year. From home I had a nice letter. Adieu. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo;

(January 3).

I wrote to you yesterday, but I do so again to-day to tell you I received your letter and to thank you for it and to tell you that it cheered me. I was rather worried for as you had seen so little of my work lately, this might cause you to think I had begun to slacken.

On the contrary, I have been working very hard lately and am still absorbed in all kinds of things in which I begin to see a light, but do not have them quite within my grasp as yet. In my former letter I told you I was making experiments in Black and White with lithographic chalk.

<sup>1</sup> Aristocratic quarters at the Hague.



You speak too well of me in your letter, but that you think well of me is all the more reason for me to try to be not quite unworthy of it. And with regard to what I said about having made some progress by those experiments in question, perhaps I do not see my own work clearly. Perhaps it is a step forward, perhaps not,—will you tell me your opinion about it in reference to the two studies I sent you, which I recently made with a few others.

In seeking for a more vigorous process than the one I used until now, I try to follow somewhat the English reproductions made with the process in question which you described, and as to the value of black I am guided also by the black sketches which Buhot made on the sample paper. And if you have an opportunity do talk it over with an expert, if reproduction of drawings like these, for instance, would be possible (aside from the second question, if they or such like would please their special taste).

As to the sentiment of the drawings, I should like to know *your* opinion, because, as I said already, I myself cannot judge what is or is not in them.

Or rather it is so that I myself prefer studies like these, even though they are not quite finished and many things in them are neglected, to drawings which form a composition, because they remind me more vividly of nature itself. You will understand my meaning, in the real studies, there is something of life itself, and the person who makes them will not think of himself, but of nature, and so prefer the study to what perhaps he may make of it afterwards, unless there may come quite a different thing as the final result of many studies, namely the type concentrated out of many individuals.

That's the highest thing in art and *there* art sometimes rises above nature—in Millet's "Sower," for instance, there is more *soul* than in a common sower in the field.

But what I want to know from you is if you think that this process would take away some of the objections you had against pencil. They are a few "Heads of the People."

And my intention is to try to form a collection of many such things, which wouldn't be quite unworthy of the title "Heads of the People."

By working hard, boy, I hope to succeed in making something

good. It isn't there yet, but I aim at it, and struggle for it. I want something serious,—something fresh—something with soul in it! Forward—forward——

From what I said just now you see clearly enough that I want to make some serious work for reproduction rather than to be satisfied with having one little drawing printed.

But all information and hints about processes are very welcome to me.

I saw in the show-window of Goupil & Co. a large etching by Fortuny: "Un Anachorète," as well as his two beautiful etchings, "Kabyle Mort," and "La Garde du Mort," I was very sorry then that I said to you some time ago that I didn't like Fortuny—I like *this* very much. But of course you understand this too.

It is the same with Boldini.

But that seriousness of Fortuny's in those three etchings, for instance, is just the thing wanting in many of his followers, who quite subside in the manner of which Fortuny gave the example, for instance, in "Le Choix d'un Modèle," etc.

And *that* is straightway opposite to the sombre, noble air of Brion, de Groux, Israëls, etc.

If possible please send me a number of the actual *Vie Moderne* and pick out one with such reproductions as those of which you wrote. Here the paper is nowhere to be seen (and the few numbers I have are years old).

When you come sooner or later, I can show you more and we can then speak about the future. You know well enough how little I am fit to cope either with dealers or with amateurs, and how contrary it is to my nature. I should like it so much if we could always continue as we do now, but it often makes me sad that I must always be a burden to you. But who knows if in time it will not come about so that you will be able to find someone who takes an interest in my work, who will take from your shoulders the burden which you took upon yourself at a most difficult time. This could only happen *then* when it has been quite proven that my work is serious, when it will speak for itself more clearly than it does now.

I am too fond of a very simple life for me to wish to change this, but later on, in order to do greater things, I shall have greater expenses too. I think I shall always work with a model—always and

always. And I must try to arrange matters so that the burden of everything doesn't always fall on you.

This is only a beginning,—afterwards, you will get better things from me, boy. In the meantime, let me know whether you do not think that some of the objections against the use of pencil alone, may not be removed somewhat by this chalk. Don't you think too that by making such drawings, I perhaps indirectly learn things for the actual lithographing?

Adieu. Once more many thanks for your letter.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

258

Dear brother,

By the same mail I send you again some studies. And this is a thought which came to me lately:

If you don't get tired of seeing such sketches, I think it would be a good thing to send you in a small portfolio, for instance, about sixty sketches. You could look them through in your room at your ease and the advantage would be that against the time of your coming here, sooner or later, you would have seen some of the things I made last year. Otherwise we would have to look them through in such a hurry if you were only here so short a time. But if you would approve of looking them through beforehand, and I should send them now, then I may count on it I hope, that you will bring them back with you, this summer, for instance, for I shall have to work from those studies later on.

My next work partly depends on keeping the studies together. Well, maybe they will amuse you,—for instance, among those old men there are perhaps some very typical ones. Well, let me hear what you think of them.

As I had to pay some bills after the New Year I am in fact already without money now, at least very little is left. Try to send rather before than after the 10th, and you will greatly oblige me.

Adieu, boy. I hope the sketches will be more or less to your liking.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

The drawings in question which I should like to send you are like the figures of the lithographs, of all kinds of types,—men, women, children.

259

Dear Theo,

When I read your letter this morning, I was greatly touched by what you wrote.<sup>1</sup> This is one of those things of which the world sometimes says, "Why should he meddle with it?" and yet it is not so much our own will as circumstances which force us to it. And once having grasped the situation a pity is roused in us, so fathomless deep that we can no longer hesitate. And with you this is the case, I think . . . what else can I say then? but that it seems to me that in such cases we must follow our impulses. Victor Hugo says: "Par-dessus la raison il y a la conscience"; there are things which we feel to be good and true, though in the cold light of reason and calculation many things remain incomprehensible and dark. And though the society in which we live considers such actions thoughtless, or reckless, or foolish, or I don't know what else—what can we say if once the hidden forces of sympathy and love have been roused in us. And though it may be that we cannot argue against the reasonings which society usually brings in against those who allow themselves to be led by sentiment and to act from impulse—arguing is not the principal thing and he who has kept his faith in God, sometimes hears the soft voice of conscience which one does well to follow then with the naïveté of a child, without speaking more about it to others than can be helped.

If one has such an encounter it is to be expected it will bring him into conflict, especially conflict with himself, because one sometimes literally does not know what to do or what not to do. But is this struggle and even the mistakes one may make, not better, and do they not develop us more than if we keep systematically away from emotions? The latter thing is, according to me, that which makes many so-called strong spirits in reality but weaklings.

<sup>1</sup> Theo had met a young woman who was sick and alone in Paris and had come to her aid.

You have my full sympathy in the matter, and as I myself am standing in the midst of realities and can tell you my experience since we spoke about it the last time, if you wish to hear something about it, or wish to speak about the future, or consult about whatever it may be, I am always entirely at your disposal.

And your writing that you will come before long to Holland is very welcome news indeed.

Perseverance is the great thing in love, once it has taken hold of us. That is, if the love is returned, for if it is decidedly not returned, it is a case in which one is literally absolutely helpless.

Well, I thank you for your confidence, and when I think it over I am relatively confident of the result. Such a feeling is no "passion," for a fathomless deep pity is at the root of it. Neither do I believe that such a thing makes you unfit for thinking about other things, on the contrary, it has a serious character which rouses and strengthens all faculties and rather augments than diminishes energy.

So after this you will allow me to say a few more things about the drawings. I am very glad you think the old man's head typical—the *model* is really *typical* I assure you. I made some more of him. To-day I drew one in lithographic chalk. Then I flung a pail of water over the drawing, and in that moistness I began to model with pencil. If it succeeds one gets very delicate tones, but it is a dangerous method which may turn out badly. But if it succeeds, the result is quite "non ébarbé," delicate tones of black which most resemble an etching. In this way I made also a woman's head standing out against the light, thus in tone, with high lights on the profile, etc.

*Did you receive the second roll with five heads* sent from here, I think on the fifth or sixth of January, it was the third roll mailed to you?

When you have looked at them for some time, I think you will find in them the same thing as in the first two, for there *must be* something of nature in them, as I literally wrested them from nature and worked after the model from beginning to end. I have a great longing to show you the studies—not because I am satisfied with my own work, but because, though I am not satisfied with it, I see that it is progressing, and that something is developing in it which will have some character.



What struck me most when I came here to the city was, for instance, the Geest and those neighbourhoods. And slowly it is taking form—but—what a struggle to bring such a thing to an end.

To-day I saw photos from drawings by Barnard, figures from Dickens, of which I saw the original drawings at the time in London. There is a force in them as in Nicolaes Maes, for instance, but quite a modern sentiment and conception. Such things warm my heart so and are so cheering because I think of the models from here, how they would look if they were drawn in that way, and then of course I say to myself, "Forward!" Work on till we have quite mastered the black and white. In art and in love there is a similarity, it is a being swayed between "je l'ai depuis longtemps" and "je ne l'aurai jamais" as Michelet expresses it, and one passes from melancholy to animation and enthusiasm, and this will always remain so, only the oscillations become stronger. Victor Hugo speaks of "comme un phare à éclipse" and that's also a good comparison.

If you have received my letter of the fifth or sixth of January, with the second roll of drawings, you will remember that I was already then quite out of cash. Now to-day I had to pay the rent and the three models whom I hadn't been able to pay before, and I also absolutely needed different drawing materials. I am working very hard at present, and I may not stop, but really the models eat me out of house and home.

Well, it would certainly be a good thing if I could have some extra, would it be possible? I hesitate to ask it because you just wrote me that about yourself, and I understand perfectly it brings you cares which I respect and with which I sympathize. But the thing with me is that by working so hard I got somewhat in arrears, and when I receive the money I have to pay out at once more than half of it. I *cannot* live more economically than we do, I have economized wherever possible, but the work develops, especially these last weeks, and I can hardly master it any longer, that is to say the expenses it brings. Would it be possible for you to send me a little more? I think you will understand it when you see the studies. Well, forgive me for speaking about it, but I cannot do otherwise, I am in arrears for the daily expenses, and that is the cause of my being absolutely without a cent before the



tenth day. At all events, write me soon, and be assured of my full sympathy in regard to what you wrote me. Adieu, boy.

A handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

260

Dear Theo,

Since I received your letter, that which you wrote has literally filled all my thoughts. And I write once more, because I am so full of it. In cases like this one has to do with a patient who is ill in body *and* in soul, so it is doubly serious, and to get the complete recovery, financial help for the necessities of life is not sufficient, but the best and most efficacious remedy is love and a home. At least I felt this last winter, and since then,—now, for instance, I feel it still more, just because experience taught me what sentiment had already told me. To save a life is a great and beautiful thing, but it is also very difficult and requires great care.

To make a home for the homeless, yes it is a thing that must be good, whatever the world may say it *cannot* be wrong, and yet it is often considered a crime.

Involuntarily I have thought it over and said to myself—what will people say about it? Will it bring you in conflict with the world, that is also a question which is in my mind and which I cannot answer as I do not know enough of the circumstances yet. And there is another thing which is the real motive of this letter, which I want you to consider and which you will perhaps already have done of your own accord.

A thing like this is a matter of long duration—of course I think it possible that you will soon see the effects of your good care, but the complete recovery in body and soul of such a severely tried constitution will take years. At this moment the woman with the children are sitting with me. When I think of last year there is a great difference. The woman is stronger and stouter, has lost very very much of her agitated air, the baby is the prettiest, healthiest, merriest little fellow you can imagine, he crows like a cock, gets nothing but the breast, but is fat and chubby.

And the poor little girl, you see from the drawing that the former deep misery has not been wiped out, and I often feel anxious about her, but still she is quite different from last year, then it was very very bad, now she is looking more childlike already.

Well, though not exactly quite normal, the situation is much better than I dared to hope last year. And when I think it over, would it have been better then, that the mother had had a miscarriage or that the baby should have withered or pined away through want of milk, that the little girl would have been more and more neglected and unclean, and the woman herself would have got into an almost unutterably miserable condition?——

Well, when I see all this, I may not doubt any more, and I say: Forward, in good courage. In the woman, something simple, really motherly, shows itself—and as that gets stronger she is saved. And how does the progress come about??? Not by physicians, or by extraordinary measures. Through the feeling of a home of her own, through a regular useful life. Not by sparing herself too much, for she *cannot* do that, but because the anxious heart finds more rest now, even under hard and tiresome work. Seeing this so intimate case as a reality before me, I come back to what I want to say: It seems to me that if you want to see good results, you must especially pay attention to the surroundings of the woman about whom you write. It would be desirable for her to be somewhere else than in an empty hotel room, she ought to have more homelike surroundings. You must think this over, for I think it an important thing; she must have distraction, through very ordinary commonplace things, which give her occupation.

Loneliness or idleness is fatal; she must have some conversation with good people. I think that to be in a homelike atmosphere would be delightful for her, for instance, to occupy herself with children. I think it rather a pity she has no child. I think it makes the case more critical still. Yes, I think the most practical thing you can do is to bring her in some homelike atmosphere. I think your principal thought at this moment is—this life must be saved—and that you unselfishly think more of her than of yourself.

Last year I could think of but one home for her, namely, my own, and had I been able to do differently, I wouldn't have taken her at once in my house, for the sake of avoiding difficulties which could not be avoided now. But with you it is a different

case, and perhaps you can, provisionally, bring her (namely, the person about whom you write) somewhere where she is safe and quiet, till she has completely recovered. I am afraid her recovery will be a long business, besides one need not trespass against the prejudices of the world *if it can be avoided*. *If it cannot be avoided* one should do what one knows is right—and last summer I would have sinned against all possible prejudices—how many there might have been, rather than leave the woman without home or shelter. But in your case, I think it can and must be done more discreetly, and if I were you I would try and find a suitable home for her—not have her alone in a room without conversation—for her own good, the sooner she gets in normal, ordinary occupation and surroundings the better.

My heart is full and I think of you all the time; just now I made another drawing for which the woman was posing.

I can tell you, boy, my experience of this year is that, though there are hard, very hard moments of care and difficulty, it is infinitely better to live with wife and children than without—but it is always wiser to learn to know each other first, that is more sensible and more prudent. And I would have done the same if it could have been arranged, but there was no other home for her than mine. Well, one has to reckon with circumstances, and sometimes giving offence cannot be avoided. So I do not in the least want to advise you to give it up, but I do think we agree that it is better to be cautious as regards the world than otherwise spoil things. So consider well. For the moment the recovery is the principal thing and the rest follows.

Wouldn't there be somebody among your friends who would be willing to assist you and take her into his house for a time?

Perhaps a kind of hospital would be preferable—the ordinary or a private one, where she could have company. Perhaps all this is already settled, and I write about it just because I do not know anything decisive.

I wish I knew when you were coming, if possible bring the old studies with you. As to what I wrote you about sending me a little more money, yes—I am rather hard up and wish it were possible, but do not deprive *her* for my sake, and know well that for the sake of what you wrote, I will try twice as hard to make progress, so that the burden may become somewhat lighter for you.

But the difficulty is that hard work costs more money because of all the expenses it brings. Write soon, for I long to hear from you. Rappard is recovering; I had a letter from him. I am very hard at work, always at all kinds of heads. Adieu. A handshake in thought,

Yours,  
Vincent.

261<sup>1</sup>

You will say that I write pretty often. I cannot help it, for as you have taken me into your confidence, I must tell you that it touched me very deeply. It is curious, in such cases, that it is so very difficult to know how far one must go. You, too, will experience this. One asks oneself, "Must I help this woman and for the rest see only a friend in her, or must I choose this woman for my wife, with whom I want to live always, is she or is she not the one?"

I think you have not been without this struggle, and perhaps are in it still. If it were otherwise it would seem rather unnatural to me.

I, at least, had that struggle, and it was so difficult that I for myself *could* not answer those questions when circumstances forced me to make a decision.

For I thought, I do not have the means of maintaining two separate households, but perhaps I have them for *one*, and so I must tell her how things are, what I can do perhaps, and what I certainly could not do. Perhaps we'll be able to struggle through together, but if we do not live together, I have not enough. For you it is perhaps a similar struggle, but in a different form, and I remember a saying of yours last year which I thought very correct and true: "Marriage is such a queer thing." Yes, indeed, it certainly is. Then you said to me, "Do not marry her," and I admitted then that circumstances were such that it was better not to speak about it for the time. And you know that since then I

<sup>1</sup> The first and last part of this letter is wanting, probably it was the answer to the money remittance of the 20th of January.

have not spoken about it again, but she and I remained true to each other. And just because I cannot think you were wrong in saying then "Do not marry her" I give you your own words to consider, and besides you will think of it yourself, for it is not I who speak so, but you yourself. And I remind you of it only because I think it was well it didn't take place at once. Do not let go that idea, for it is a good thing that love ripens so that marriage becomes quite a subordinate thing. It is safer and it doesn't hurt anybody.

One thing I want to tell you in the beginning which is so obvious that you will understand it yourself. Whether it brings you in difficulties or not, I respect the noble feeling which urged you to help her, and because I respect it, I hope you will think me worthy of your confidence even though you may meet with greater or lesser difficulties.

However, I do not consider the matter with melancholy, but with full hope of a good result, that is, happiness for you and for her. But I repeat—it is probable that sooner or later a crisis will occur, arising from a kind of mutual disappointment—if there were a child, that would be a kind of lightning conductor to you both. But it isn't there in your case, so especially when the crisis comes—not *now*, but *afterwards*, confide in me then and tell me; for there are the cliffs on which alas many a love is wrecked which might have been saved. If one can avoid those rocks, there follows a time of clear sailing again.

Though I have written you often, I am very hard at work. I cannot tell you how I long to speak with you about many things. To-morrow I get a sou'wester for the heads. Heads of fishermen, old and young, that's what I have been thinking of for a long time, and I have made one already, then afterwards I couldn't get a sou'wester. Now I will have one of my own, an old one over which many storms and seas have passed.

Dear Theo,

The more I think of it, the deeper the impression is which your last letter made upon me.



Taken at large (apart from the difference between the two persons in question) to you and to me there appeared on the cold cruel pavement, a sad, sombre woman's figure and neither you nor I passed it by, but we both stopped and followed the human impulse of our hearts.

Such an encounter has something of an apparition about it, at least when one recalls it, one sees a pale face, a sorrowful look like an *Ecce Homo* on a dark background, all the rest disappears. That is the sentiment of an *Ecce Homo*, and in reality there is the same expression, but here it is on a woman's face. Afterwards it decidedly becomes different—but that first expression one never forgets.

Underneath an English woman's figure (by Paterson) is written the name *Doloroso*; that expresses it well.

I think of the two women now and at the same time I thought of a drawing by Pinwell, "*The Sisters*," in which I find that *Doloroso* expression. That drawing represents two women in black, in a dark room, the one has just come home and hangs her coat on the rack. The other, while taking up some white sewing, just smells a primrose, standing on the table.

That Pinwell reminds one a little of Feyen Perrin—in his early work,—reminds one also of Thys Maris, but with an even purer sentiment.

He was so much a poet that he saw the sublime in the most ordinary, commonplace things. His work is rare, I saw but little of it, but that little was so beautiful that now, after ten years at least, I remember it as clearly as when I saw it for the first time.

Of that club of draughtsmen it was said at the time, "it is too good to last." Herkomer's words show alas it has been true, but it is not dead yet, and in literature as well as in art, it will be difficult to find a better conception than theirs of that time.

I often disliked many things in England, but that Black and White and Dickens, are things that make up for it all. It is not that I disapprove of everything in the present, far from it, but still it seems to me that something of the fine spirit of that time that ought to have stayed, is lost—in art especially. But also in life itself. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but I cannot say it differently—I do not know exactly what it is, but it is not only the



black and white that changed its course and deviated from the healthy noble beginning. There is rather in general a kind of scepticism and indifference and coolness notwithstanding all activity. But all this is too vague, too indefinite. I do not think too much about it, because I think of my drawings and have no time to lose.

I am still busy making heads this week, especially women's heads, with bags among others.

Did you ever see anything of Boyd Houghton, that is one from the beginning of the *Graphic*, who, though little known, yet takes his peculiar place (he died young)?

I thought of him when you once wrote about Daumier's "Barricade." He also at the time drew the Parisian pétroleuses and barricades, but afterwards he went to America, and I know drawings of his of Quakers, and a Mormon church and Indian women, etc., and immigrants.

In such a barricade scene, for instance, he was somewhat weird or rather mysterious like Goya. In that same way, quite Goya-like, he also treated the American subjects, but then all at once there are some that by a wonderful soberness remind one of Meryon.

His woodcuts might almost pass for etchings. The world says, "*Too good to last*," but for that very reason because it is rare the *good lasts*. It is not produced every day, it will never be got mechanically, but what is, is, and that is not lost, but lasts. And if later on another good thing turns up, the first keeps its value, so I think one must not regret that such and such a thing doesn't become more general; even though not general, the good and beautiful things that exist remain.

What about the etchings which Cadart started at the time? Did they also prove to be something "too good to last"?

I know quite well that many and beautiful etchings are published nowadays. But I mean the old series "*société des aquafortistes*," in which appeared "*Les Deux Frères*" of Feyen Perrin and the "*Parc à moutons*" by Daubigny and de Bracquemond and so many others, did they keep their full power or do they slacken?

Even if they slacken, the things they have made are they not important enough to stay always, so the expression "too good to last," loses its meaning? Daubigny, Millet, Feyen Perrin, so

many others, showed what the etching needle can do, like the *Graphic*, etc., showed what black and white could do.

And this is a truth that always remains and can give energy to whosoever wants it.

The truth is this, that whenever different people together love the same thing and work at it, then union makes strength, and combined, they can do more than if their different energies were striving each in a separate direction.

By working together one gets stronger and a whole is formed, though the personality of each need not be wiped out by working together. And therefore I wish that Rappard were quite better; we do not really work together, but we have the same thoughts about many things. He is recovering, though, and we are already fussing about our woodcuts again.

But I hope always that we will become better friends still than we now are, and that perhaps afterwards we will go together and visit, for instance, the miners. But for the moment, I think we must both apply ourselves to a thorough study of the figure; the more we master that, the easier it becomes to carry out such plans. He writes that he had fever, that's all, that he is still very weak, but about his illness he writes little.

We've had snow again, which is thawing just now. It is very beautiful, that thaw weather.

To-day, while the snow is melting, one feels spring approaching, as it were, from afar.

I think when you come, sooner or later, we'll have a real good time together.

I long for the spring breezes to blow away the weariness from working indoors so long.

I am very glad to have my sou'wester; I wonder if you will find some good in those fishermen's heads.

The last one I made this week was of a fellow with a white clipped beard.

I know a drawing by Boyd Houghton which he calls "My Models," it represents a passage where a few invalids, one with crutches, a blind man, street urchin, etc., came to visit the painter on Christmas Day.

There is something very pleasant in the intercourse with the models, one learns much from them. This winter I have had

some people that I shall not easily forget. It is a charming saying of Edward Frère's that he kept the same models so long till "celles qui posaient dans le temps pour les bébés, posent maintenant pour les mères." Well, adieu, Theo, write soon, my best wishes, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

February 3.

I am longing again for your letter; as it is already the third of February (and the postman for to-day has passed) I write you by way of precaution. If you have written a few days later, it's all right, but remembering what happened this winter with the letter, I inform you of it in case you might have written before the first.

Then you would do well, perhaps, to inquire.

I have noticed that the postman sometimes gives letters for the Schenkweg to persons who live there, instead of delivering them themselves.

It is sometimes a long way around for the postman and I know it, because the man has asked me, now and then, to deliver a few things for him, which I did, of course, but I thought then of the letter that got lost. Well!

The weather has been very stormy here these days, especially so last night. It will be very rough at sea.

How is your patient? From what you write, I see things that touch me deeply, that are really noble (for instance, that *she* paid the debts of the man who betrayed her). That not being "at home" of the Deputy reminded me of the name *Punch* gives to the secretary of the home affairs (the "Home Secretary" is his title).

*Punch* calls this personage always the "*seldom-at-home*" secretary. How many of those "*seldom-at-home*" people there are. And all these together are called by Dickens the "circumlocution office."

Many people are standing sighing before the door of those "how-not-to-do-it" institutions, and the sighs there are not less deep, perhaps, than they were on the old Bridge of Sighs.

I feel very weak of late. I am afraid I have been overworking myself, and how miserable are those "dregs" of the work, that depression after over-exertion. Life has then the colour of dish-water; it becomes something like an ash-heap.

On such a day one would like to have the company of a friend. That sometimes clears up the leaden mist.

On such days I am sometimes terribly worried about the future and am melancholy about my work, and feel quite helpless.

But it is dangerous to speak or think too much about it, so enough of it.

In spite of this, I have been working on a water-colour, a sketch again of diggers, or rather, road-menders, here on the Schenkweg, but it isn't good at all. I also drew a few figures in crayon which I think are better.

Not only with crayon, but the whole thing sponged, and the shadows softened, the lights retouched.

It may be I have caught cold, at all events I must get rid of that depression before I can do anything properly.

I am reading "My Prison" by Fritz Reuter, that is very witty. The Germans have their peculiar humour quite different from that of the English. Herkomer has among other things painted a peasants' carnival, something like the Peasant Breughel, which has that humour very strongly.

Speaking about Herkomer, I read some time ago, a kind of biography of his, though rather incomplete.

But the following struck me.

He lived and painted for a time in an empty house, or one that wasn't finished perhaps, because he couldn't pay the rent.

Then he came to the *Graphic* and was relatively free from care. But even when employed there, he was still but little respected. So little that his first sketch of the "Last Muster at Chelsea Hospital," a drawing that differs relatively but little from the definite composition, but has a certain rough aspect, was almost rejected.

*Nobody* in the *Graphic* administration approved of it, except the manager (it would greatly astonish me if this manager were still in function).

Through his efforts the sketch was reproduced, and he asked Herkomer if he could make it again for him more elaborately.

So this is the origin of a picture that since then has been

the wonder and admiration of many, in Paris as well as in London.

Now almost everybody would admire the first sketch also.

The biography also tells that he is *not* a man who works easily, on the contrary, from the beginning, and ever since, he has had to struggle with a kind of awkwardness, and no picture is finished without severe mental effort.

That he is, even now, called rough by many is a thing I can hardly understand. I can hardly think of any work more intimate than his.

When you come, I will show you the woodcut of the almshouse for women, it is less known, but not less beautiful than that of the old men's. Something like the "Sewing Class at Katwyk" by Israëls.

Well, write soon, if you haven't done so already.

I am anxious to know how your patient is. My best wishes for her and for everything. Also my congratulations for father's birthday. I sent father a drawing, which I had made according to his remarks about the first lithography of the old man. Not because I thought father was exactly right, but I thought: now I know how you should like to have it, I will try and make it so for you, but I am afraid I didn't succeed. Even though one tries hard, one doesn't always succeed in pleasing other people. Father didn't exactly write that he didn't like it, but it was between the lines. It may be that it wasn't good after all. Well, they will show it to you whenever you go there, but don't mention it to them. Adieu.

Yours,

Vincent.

264

Dear Theo,

February 5.

Many thanks for your letter and for the money.

When I read and re-read your letters about your patient it reminds me of many things. And I should like to write and ask you much more about it, but as I know the person only from your letters it is all too vague and indefinite and sometimes I have torn



up a letter because of that. But believe me, I think of it all the time, and I can very well understand and perfectly agree with you, that but for the melancholy idea of her suffering, such an encounter is a thing for which you feel grateful, and consider it very uncommon luck. That *je ne sais quoi* as if she came from the heath, or whatever it is that reminds you of her native country, on that old coast of Brittany is something that I think will become rather stronger than weaker, the longer you will be with her. Your expression: "Will she later on be like the dog with the shepherd or something better?" is rather characteristic. Don't you think it probable that one time will differ greatly from another? In one love, there are so many different phases or metamorphoses, *just through the faithfulness to one same love*—that it becomes different every time.

That operation will be a hard time—if I were you I wouldn't speak to her too much about finding a situation afterwards, as because of her foot<sup>1</sup> the future is so undecided—better leave it undecided. For I would be afraid that, for instance, in a crisis of pain, she might quite wrongly get some fixed idea in her head. "I must do this or that," that oftens happens to sick women, it might make her obstinate against the feelings of her own heart, which would pain you because it was only from delicacy that by the idea of a situation you wanted to make her future *free and independent*, and she might take it as if you felt more indifferent about her than is really the case. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but women do not always understand delicacy, any more than they do humour, and though one must certainly act with delicacy, it often gives rise to misunderstandings (though, in my opinion, one isn't responsible for them) which make life more difficult in short.

I do not know whether Heyerdahl, for instance, would find anything picturesque in the daily ways of the woman with whom I live. But Daumier certainly would.

I thought of Heyerdahl's saying "*je n'aime pas qu'une figure soit trop corrompue*"—when I was drawing—not the woman, but an old man with a bandaged eye—and I found it *not* true. There are some ruins of physiognomies that are full of expression, as, for instance, Hille Bobbe by Frans Hals or some heads by Rembrandt.

<sup>1</sup> The patient had to be operated on for a tumour in the foot.



As to Heyerdahl I do not doubt his intention in saying it, is all right, otherwise I don't think it would pass.

In the last letter I wrote you, I asked casually after the work of Lhermitte. In the articles about the Black and White he is always named first as "the Millet and Jules Breton in Black and White," and there was, for instance, a description of a drawing of old women on the cliffs, and about his technique; they said there was none more daring, bold, or strong than he, even astonishingly so, and other drawings couldn't be compared to them, and his touch was broader than the broadest. They compared him also with Legros, but only with the most extraordinary, most exceptional drawings or etchings by Legros, which are also very strong and broad, for instance, "The Pew."

Lad, I still feel but poorly, and I've had a very decided warning that I must be careful—my eyes felt so tired sometimes, but I wouldn't pay any attention to it. Now, last night, especially, there was a rather strong secretion of the tear glands, and the lashes stuck together, and my sight has been dim and troubled.

Ever since the middle of December I have been drudging incessantly, especially on those heads. This last week I have been out of doors a good deal to refresh myself. I have taken baths, washed my head often with cold water, etc., etc. But at such a time one feels so miserable, I have a large pile of studies—but they don't interest me then, and I find them all bad. Rappard wrote me again this week, said he was recovering, but slowly, still feels weak but begins to walk a little bit now and then. But he wrote very clearly and plainly about many things concerning the work.

There is a spring feeling in the air already, and it will not be long before the lark sings again in the meadows.

Do you think you will be able to get here this spring???

I am rather afraid not. I long to talk over the studies of this winter with you, and also with Rappard when he has quite recovered, he will come here some time.

I will take a few weeks' rest, and be out of doors as much as possible to change my thoughts. I want to use my studies for water-colours, for instance, but at present it's no use.

My eyes and my face just now look as if I had been on a spree, but that, of course, has not been the case—on the contrary, but who knows if, after some time, somebody whom I meet on the street

will not make the remark that I am evidently on the road to dissipation. Those things are sometimes so absurd that they involuntarily make me laugh.

In the evening at sunset, there are effects of dark clouds with silver linings that are splendid, for instance, walking along the Bezuidenhout or along the woodside.

You will remember that from long ago. From the window of the studio, it is beautiful also, or in the meadows, one feels the spring from afar, and now and then there is something balmy in the air.

Adieu, boy, thanks again for your letter, the best wishes for your patient. I hope that I shall soon find again a drawing or a study that has some interest for me, it is so unpleasant when one must take a rest. One *cannot* rest for the very reason that one must. Adieu. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

265

Dear Theo,

February 8.

My hearty congratulations for father's birthday, and thanks for your letter, which I was very glad to receive just now. I must congratulate you especially on the operation being over. Such things as you describe make one shudder! May the worst be over now, at least the crisis past! Poor woman! If women do not always show in their thoughts that energy and elasticity of the men, who have aimed at reflection and analysis, we cannot blame them, at least in my opinion, because in general, they have to spend so much more strength than we in suffering pain. They suffer more and are more sensitive.

And though they do not always understand our thoughts, they are certainly sometimes capable of understanding when one is good to them. Not always, though, but "the spirit is willing," and there is sometimes in women a curious kind of goodness.

There must be a great load off your mind now that the operation is over.

What a mystery life is, and love is a mystery within a mystery. It certainly never remains the same in a literal sense, but the

changes are like the ebb and flow of the tide and leave the sea unchanged.

Since I wrote you last, I have given my eyes some rest and it has done me good, though they still ache now and then.

Do you know what I have been involuntarily thinking, that in the first period of a painter's life one unconsciously makes it very hard for oneself—by a feeling of not being able to master the work—by an uncertainty as to whether one will ever master it—by a great ambition to make progress, by a lack of self-confidence—one cannot banish a certain feeling of agitation, and one hurries oneself though one doesn't like to be hurried.

This cannot be helped, and it is a time which one must go through, and which in my opinion may not and cannot be otherwise.

In the studies, too, one is conscious of a nervousness and a certain dryness which is directly opposite to the calm, broad touch one strives for, and yet it doesn't work well if one applies oneself too much to acquire that broadness of touch.

This gives one a feeling of nervous unrest and agitation, and one feels an oppression as on summer days before a thunderstorm. I had that feeling again just now, and when I have it, I change my work, just to begin again anew.

That trouble one has at the beginning sometimes gives an awkwardness to the studies.

But I do not consider this as a discouragement, because I have noticed it in myself as well as in others, who afterwards got rid of it naturally.

And I believe *sometimes*, one keeps that *painful* way of working one's whole life, but not always with so little result as in the beginning. What you write about Lhermitte is quite in keeping with the review of the exhibition of Black and White. They, too, speak about the bold touch which can almost be compared only to Rembrandt. I should like to know such an artist's conception of Judas; you write of his drawing Judas before the scribes, I think that Victor Hugo could describe that in detail, *so that one would see it*, but to paint those expressions would be more difficult still.

I found a page by Daumier: "ceux qui ont vu un drame" and "ceux qui ont vu une vaudeville," I begin to long more and more

for Daumier. There is much pith and stability in him, he is witty and yet full of sentimental passion; sometimes, for instance in "The Drunkards," and possibly also in "The Barricade," which I do not know, I find a passion which can be compared to the white heat of iron.

The same thing is in some heads by Frans Hals, for instance, it is so sober that it seems cold, but when you look at it for a short while—one is astonished to see how someone working apparently with so much emotion and so completely wrapped up in Nature, has at the same time the presence of mind to put it down with such a firm hand. I found the same thing in studies and drawings by de Groux; perhaps Lhermitte is also at that white heat. And Menzel too.

There are sometimes passages in Balzac or Zola, for instance in *Père Goriot*, where words reach a degree of passion that is at white heat.

I sometimes think I will make an experiment, and try to work in quite a different way, that is, to dare more and to risk more, but I think that first I absolutely must study more the figure directly from the model.

I am also looking for a way to shut off the light in the studio, or to let it in. It doesn't fall enough from above, I think, and there is too much of it. For the time being I shut it off with cardboard, now and then, but I must try and get some shutters from the landlord.

What was in the letter I told you I have torn up was quite in keeping with what you say.

But while finding more and more that one is not perfect oneself, and makes mistakes, and that other people do likewise, so that continually difficulties arise which are the opposite of illusions, I think that those who do not lose courage and who do not become indifferent, ripen through it, and one must bear hardships in order to ripen.

Sometimes I cannot believe that I am only thirty years old, I feel so much older.

I feel older only when I think that most people who know me consider me a failure, and when it really might be so, if some things do not change for the better, and when I think *it might be so*, I feel it so vividly that it quite depresses me and makes me as

downhearted as if it were really so. In the more normal and calmer mood, I am sometimes glad that thirty years have passed, and not without teaching me something for the future, and I feel strength and energy for the next thirty years, if I may live that long.

And in my imagination I see years before me of serious work, and happier than the first thirty.

How it will be in reality doesn't depend *only* on myself, the world and circumstances must also contribute to it.

That which concerns me and for which I am responsible is that I make the most of the circumstances and try my best to make progress.

The age of thirty is, for the working man, just the beginning of a period of some stability, and as such, one feels young and full of energy.

But, at the same time, a period of life is passed, which makes one melancholy, thinking some things will never come back. And it is no silly sentimentalism to feel a certain regret. Well, many things really begin at the age of thirty, and certainly all is not over then. But one doesn't expect from life what one has already learned it cannot give, but rather one begins to see more and more clearly that life is only a kind of sowing time, and the harvest is not here.

Perhaps that's the reason that one sometimes feels indifferent toward the opinion of the world, and if that opinion depresses us all too strongly, one may throw it off.

Perhaps I had better tear up this letter again.

I understand perfectly that you are quite absorbed by the condition of the woman, that is one of the things which are necessary for her rescue, and also for her recovery.

For one must throw oneself headlong into it, and the saying is true: "if you want it well done, you must do it yourself," you mustn't leave it to others. That means that one must keep in hand the care in general and the management of the whole.

We had a few real spring days, for instance, last Monday, which I enjoyed very much.

The change of the seasons is a thing which is greatly felt by the people. For instance, in a neighbourhood like the Geest and in those courts of so-called almshouses, the winter is always a difficult, anxious and oppressive time, and spring is a deliverance. If one

pays attention to it, one sees that such a first spring day is a kind of gospel.

And it is pathetic to see so many grey, withered faces come out of doors on such a day, not to do something special, but as if to convince themselves that spring is there. So, for instance, all kinds of people, of whom one doesn't expect it, throng the market around the spot where a man sells crocuses, snowdrops, morning-stars and other bulbs. Sometimes a dried-up government clerk, apparently a kind of Jusserand in a threadbare, black coat with greasy collar—he in contact with the snowdrops was typical—I think the poor people and the painters have in common that feeling for the weather and the change of the seasons. Of course everybody feels it, but for the well-to-do middle-class it is not so important, and it doesn't change much the frame of mind in general. I thought it a characteristic saying of a navvy: "In winter I suffer as much from the cold as the winter corn does."

Now for your patient too spring will also be welcome, may it do her good! How terrible that operation was, at least I was frightened when I read the description.

Rappard is recovering, did I tell you he had brain fever? It will be some time before he can go to work again, but he begins to take a walk now and then.

If my eyes do not improve, I'll follow your advice and bathe them with tea. As it is, they are getting better, so for the present I'll leave them alone. For they never troubled me before, except once this winter when I had toothache, so I believe it is nothing but strain and overwork.

On the contrary, of late my eyes can stand the fatigue of drawing better than at first.

Write soon again when you can, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

I do not know whether you know those little almshouses on the Brouwersgracht opposite the hospital. I should like to draw there when the weather permits. This week I made a few scratches there already. They are a few rows of small houses with little gardens which I think belong to the charity board.



Dear brother,

It is again Sunday, and so I write to you again. Sometimes it seems to me that I didn't express warmly and cordially enough how much I was touched by what you recently told me. As to the question whether an honest love might become "une illusion perdue" I do not doubt but it may happen sometimes; however, it would greatly astonish me if it should be so in your case, neither do I believe it will be so with me.

Michelet says curiously enough, that love at first is frail as a spider's web, and grows to be as strong as a cable.

But only on condition of faithfulness.

I have often walked on the Geest of late, in those streets and alleys where I often walked with the woman last year, in the beginning. The weather was damp, everything was beautiful there then, and when I came home I said to the woman, "It is still just the same as last year." I tell you this because you spoke of disenchantment, no, no, it is true there is a withering and budding in love as in nature, but nothing dies entirely. It is true there is an ebb and flood, but the sea remains the sea. And in love, either for a woman, or for art, there are times of exhaustion and impotence, but there is no lasting disenchantment.

I consider love as well as friendship not only a feeling but an action, and as such, it demands exertion and activity, of which exhaustion and impatience are the consequence.

A sincere and true love is blessed, I think, though that doesn't prevent occasional hard times.

I am glad that my eyes are no worse, rather a little better, but it is not quite over, and I must be careful. I can tell you it rather upset me. How I should love to talk with you—for I am not discouraged about the work, nor listless nor disheartened, but I am at a standstill, and that is, perhaps, because I ought to have some intercourse with someone who sympathizes, and to whom I could speak about it; here just now there is not a soul I can take into my confidence. *I do not mean that there is nobody to be trusted*, far from it, but unluckily I am not in touch with them. I sometimes think how years ago when I came to the Hague for the first time, at Goupil & Co. of the three years I spent there, the first two

were rather unpleasant, but the last one much happier, so who knows if the same will not happen now?

I like the proverb: "when things are at the worst they are sure to mend," but I ask myself now and then "have we not meanwhile reached the worst," for the mending would not be at all unwelcome to me in short.

Lately I read "Le Peuple" by Michelet, or rather I read it sometime ago this winter, but lately I was strongly reminded of it. That book has been written quickly, and apparently in a hurry, and if that was the only one of Michelet one read one wouldn't think it very good, and wouldn't be struck by it. But knowing his more finished books, "La Femme," "L'Amour," "La Mer," and the "Histoire de la Révolution," I thought this like the rough sketch of a painter whom I like very much, and, as such, it had a peculiar charm. Michelet's style is admirable in my eyes. I do not doubt that there will be many authors who disapprove of Michelet's technique, as there are some painters who give themselves the right of finding fault with Israël's technique. Michelet has strong feelings, and what he feels he dashes down on paper without caring in the least how he does it, and without thinking in the least of technique or conventional forms, but just shaping it in some form so that it can be understood by those who want to understand it. "Le Peuple" is to me not so much a first idea or impression, but rather an unfinished but prepared and studied conception. Some parts are apparently done hastily from nature and joined to other parts that are more finished and studied.

De Bock seems to be in very flourishing circumstances, judging from his fur coat. I hadn't seen him for months, but met him a few days ago in the above-mentioned beautiful fur coat. Yet I cannot say he himself looked flourishing. Have you sometimes felt sympathy for a person whom you *saw* to be unhappy, but who pretended and was considered to be flourishing, and have you felt within you: if I tried to be friends with him he would either think that I made fun of him and it would be almost impossible to gain his confidence or his friendship—or even if I came so far, he would say "I have chosen my course, and shall stick to it," and we would have no influence on each other. It is in this way that I think of de Bock, and though I feel real sympathy for him and admire much of his work, I do not think that he and I would profit by each

other's society, and we have opposite views of life, especially, and of art too. It is sometimes difficult for me to give up a friendship, but if I come in a studio and have to think: speak about inane things, do not touch anything of importance and do not express your real feeling about art, that would make me more melancholy than if I stayed away altogether. Just because I should like to find and keep real friendship, it is difficult for me to conform to conventional friendship.

If there is, *on both sides*, a longing to be friendly, there may be some difference of opinion, but for all that, one doesn't fall out so easily, and if one does, it is easily made up. Where there is convention, it is almost unavoidable that bitterness arises, for the very reason that one cannot feel free, and even though one doesn't express one's real feelings, they are sufficient to leave from both sides a continuous disagreeable impression and to make it hopeless that one should profit by each other's society. Where there is convention, there is mistrust, and mistrust gives rise to all kinds of intrigues. And with a little more sincerity on both sides our lives would be so much easier.

Meanwhile one gets used to existing conditions, but it is not normal, and if it were possible to go back at once to a period of thirty, forty or fifty years ago, I think one would feel more at home in that period than in this one, that is to say, you and I, for instance, would feel more at home in it. Fifty years hence nobody will wish to go back to *this* period, I think, for if there follows a time of antiquated decay or so-called time of "perukes and crinolines," people will be too dull to think about it at all, and if there comes a change for the better, *tant mieux*.

I do not think it absurd to expect that such a time of stagnation may arrive, for that which in Dutch history is called "the time of perukes and crinolines" also had its origin in the giving up of principles, and in substituting the original by the conventional. The Dutch people, at their best, are the "Syndics," but if the salt loses its savour, there follows a time of stagnation, of "perukes"; not all at once, but history proves it may come.

It is sometimes hard for me to believe that a period of, for instance, only fifty years, is sufficient to bring about a total change so that *everything* is reversed. But just by thinking about history one sees those relatively quick and continual changes, and I

draw the conclusion from it that every man puts some weight in the scale, be it ever so little, and that it does make a difference how one thinks and acts. The battle is but short and it is worth while to be sincere. If many are sincere and firm, the whole period becomes good—at least energetic.

Yes, I often think of what you wrote me lately. I think there must be a great difference between the woman you met and the one I have already lived with for a full year, but what they have in common is their sorrow and their sex.

Considered at large such an encounter is an apparition. Have you read Erckmann-Chatrian's "Madame Thérèse"? It contains a description of a woman who is recovering, very touching and beautiful, it is a simple book but it is deep at the same time.

If you do not know *Madame Thérèse*, do read it. I think she will like it too, and be touched by it.

At times I regret that the woman with whom I live can understand neither books nor art. But (though she decidedly cannot do so) my being still so much attached to her, is that not a proof that there is something sincere between us? Perhaps she will learn it later on, and it may strengthen the bond between us, but now with the children you understand her hands are full already. And, through the children especially she comes in contact with reality and learns involuntarily. Books and reality and art are for me alike. Somebody who stood outside real life would bore me, but somebody who is right in it, knows and feels naturally.

If I did not look for art in reality, I should probably find her stupid, now I rather wish it were otherwise, but am after all contented with things as they are.

I hope to be able to work regularly again this week. I feel so strongly that I must work doubly hard to make up for my having started so late, and it is the feeling that I am behind others, because of my age, which worries me. These days Montmartre will have those curious effects which Michel, for instance, has painted; that dry, withered grass and sand against a grey sky. At least in the meadows, at present the colour often reminds me of Michel, the soil, yellowish brown, withered grass with a muddy road full of pools, black tree trunks, a greyish white sky, the houses at a distance in tone, but with a little touch of colour in the red of the roofs. Those effects are striking enough and Michel's secret

(like Weissenbruch's) depends on taking the proper measurements and finding the correct proportion of foreground against background, and feeling the exact direction in which the lines run in perspective.

These things are not found by chance (Michel's works are numerous enough, and I see clearly from them that he had reached such a height that it seemed like child's play to him), but it is a *science*, and I think that Michel, before his time of success, must have been perplexed and disappointed sometimes because things *wouldn't go right*.

Simple though it all may seem, there is a very expensive general science behind it, like there is behind even more simple looking works, Daumier's for instance.

Well, I must finish up this letter. Write soon, if you haven't done so already. I am longing to hear if your patient has had no serious consequences of the operation. Isn't it curious that in the very first letter I had from Rappard, after his illness, he speaks again with great animation about woodcuts he has found, among others some of Lançon's. He is now so eager for them that I need not urge him, and at first he cared for them as little as others do. He is getting a very good collection, and I think I see in his work and intentions the influence of those same Englishmen, though of course he is far from imitating them in the least. But, for instance, that he went to make studies in the asylum for the blind, before his illness, is the direct practical result of his love for draughtsmen like Herkomer or Frank Holl. Adieu, boy, write soon. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Many hearty thanks for your letter, the enclosure was very welcome, it helps me a great deal. I begin by telling you that it takes a load off my mind to know that the past of the woman, about whom you write, is quite different from what I first involuntarily supposed. That, namely, she has known not only poverty and narrow-mindedness, but other things, too, so that I suppose she can fully



appreciate you also as to culture and broad-mindedness more than a woman who from childhood on has been broken by misery and knows no better. From what you tell about her reading, for instance, I see she has a sentiment which many other women absolutely lack. And a woman like her, what is she without a man to appreciate and understand her? Something pathetic, yes, you call it by the true name, something like a spirit or a shadow.

For us men, it is sometimes bitterly hard too, that being alone. How deep Michelet's saying is: "Pourquoi y a-t-il une femme seule sur la terre?" You once said, or rather wrote: "Earnestness is better than the most delicate raillery." It is the same thing here, *must* one not take such a figure seriously? I mean, the life of us men is so dependent on our relations to women, and the opposite, of course, is also true, that it seems to me one must never laugh at women or think lightly of them. If one reads it well, Balzac's "Petites misères de la vie conjugale," are very very serious and well-meant, not intended to separate but to unite, but not everybody sees that in it.

I think you will also find her in the work of Ary Scheffer.

As to reading, I think the works of Michelet would be something to fit her mood.

Just like Victor Hugo.

And what Michelet himself thought desirable reading for a woman, is the "Imitation of Jesus Christ" by Thomas à Kempis; of course the original edition, not the one that has been altered and spoiled by the clergy.

But of French literature, I suppose you will know more than I. That book by Thomas à Kempis is as beautiful as, for instance, Ary Scheffer's "Consolator," it can be compared to nothing else. But I have seen editions of it that were changed and distorted purposely, by adding to each chapter a kind of explanation that was terrible. I once bought one like that; it was a very bad bargain indeed.

And do you know what seems to me excellent, just when a patient must breathe *fresh air* from a book? It is "La Nature chez elle," by Bodmer, with text by Theophile Gautier. The *old* series for sale at the *Illustration* or *Monde Illustré*. But I recently saw a "Nature chez elle" which was much thinner and less fresh



than the first series, neither was the text by Theophile Gautier, I think. Probably made by Bodmer, at a later period, when he had lost some of his first vigour.

Lad, I have been drawing with such delight, fisherman's heads with that sou'wester I told you of, on which the fish scales still stuck when I got it.

That feeling you must have had on your walk to the hospital or clinic, on the day when you visited her after the operation, is not that one of the things one can hardly speak about, so strong is the emotion, at least when you wrote to me about that operation, I remembered last summer, when I visited the woman the day of her confinement.

Lately you wrote about a certain Laurens, who generally makes large drawings or pictures. Then I didn't know him (only as a painter of Oriental landscapes), but to-day I saw an etching by Courtry after a picture by Jean Paul Laurens, a scene from the Revolution, and I liked it very much, especially some types and heads.

But it is quite possible that his pictures are not so good as the etching.

Is the work of Jules Goupil still good? One feels inclined to ask that question, when one sees men like, for instance, Emile Wauters and Hocterinx lose their strong grip on reality, for things that are correct, yes, and of a fine sentiment too, but which do not reach the vigour of their first work and rather betray a certain timidity.

And it is a pity when it is so.

To remain vigorous like Israëls, for instance, how few they are who do so.

Recently I saw a new edition of R. Caldecott's picture books, and bought two of them, namely, illustrations of Washington Irving's "Sketch Book," which both together cost a shilling now. There is a description of Christmas in a little village at the beginning of this century. Those small drawings are pithy, like those of Jacque, for instance, or Menzel. When you come, you must look at the woodcuts again. There are some people like Caldecott now, for instance, who are quite original and highly interesting. How I wish we could be together more, of an evening or Sunday to look together at those things which many others pass by.

I am reading Eliot's "Middlemarch."

Eliot analyzes like Balzac or Zola, but English situations, with an English sentiment. Adieu, boy, may everything go well, and once more, best wishes.

Yours,

Vincent.

268

Dear Theo,

I wanted to write to you already last Sunday, but I waited a little, because I was trying to do something which was not yet decided. A few weeks ago, I read Fritz Reuter's "From my Prison," in which is described, in the most witty way, how Fritz Reuter and others, who were confined in a fortress, tried to make their life as comfortable as possible, and to obtain several privileges from the major in charge.

That book gave me the idea of attacking my landlord about certain improvements which would make the work more easy for me.

And I have been several times down to Voorburg, where he lives, in order to try if he would do something for me.

There were old shutters and boards lying around there, which I wanted to use, but it was hard to get them. But I have them now.

You know there are three windows in the studio. They give far too much light, even when I cover them, and I have been thinking a long time how to remedy this.

But he refused to do anything unless I paid for it. But now, after a new attack, I have six shutters and about six long boards. Those shutters are sawn through now, so that both the upper and lower halves can be opened or closed at will, and the light admitted or shut out either from above or from below.

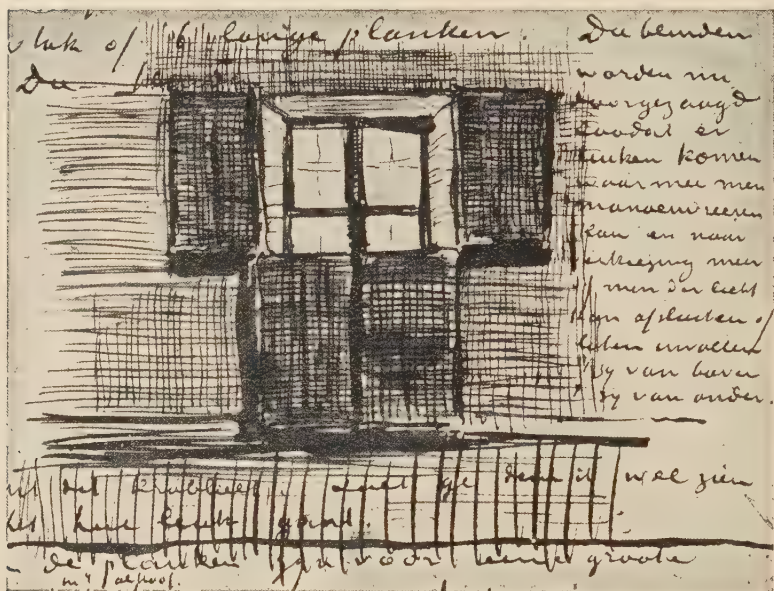
From this little scratch you will see that it is very handy. And the boards are for a big closet in the alcove to put away drawings, prints, books, and to hang up different blouses and jackets, old coats, shawls, hats, last but not least, the sou'-wester, all things which I need for the models.

I have always paid the landlord regularly, and I now told him

briefly and to the point, that he might think the rent low, I wouldn't contradict this, but I wanted him to consider that the rent itself for me was very heavy, and that I could not work well so, and couldn't make progress before I had better light.

That if he wouldn't change it, I, for my part, should really have to take another studio.

That if I had the money, I wouldn't mind it, but in the given circumstances, I couldn't pay more than I did. So that to pay



a higher rent for me was out of the question, and my staying or leaving would depend on his consenting to these improvements; if he didn't mind my leaving, well, we would separate, on good terms, without more ado. Well, then he said, no, he would do *something*, and so we arranged at last that I should only have to pay a few guilders for wages. He has been several times to the studio and is not exactly a cheat, though he is rather grasping (something of a Yankee) and the studio seemed better than he expected (he hadn't been there since July last year), at least, when in the studio he gave his consent, and even more easily than I had expected.

If one only had to deal with people in the studio! But I, for my part, cannot get on well with people outside it, and cannot get them to do anything.

I've been drawing a few figures, rather large-size, bust or half-length, which, with a few others I already had, will become a kind of decoration for the hall and stairs, though they are really nothing but ordinary studies.

So you see, from all of this, I have been throwing myself headlong into it again, in order to get new ideas.

For instance, in Voorburg, when I went with him to pick out that wood, I saw beautiful things of working people in a shed, and the digging out of a cellar, and the laying of the foundation of a house. I thought again then of the description you once gave me of those working people at Montmartre, when you witnessed an accident in a stone quarry.

You know, I already had something before the windows, namely, some canvas stretched on rods. It can be used for something else now, that is, stretched with a darker or lighter material, it will make a very good background, if one wants to draw heads, for instance.

You understand that I can also quite close one or two of the windows now, and so get one general light, which will make the effects much stronger, that otherwise were neutralized, by reflections or different lights.

If I had to pay for it myself, the job would have been quite out of the question as being too expensive, but as it is I am mighty glad to have it.

I had felt the necessity of better light, especially when making those last drawings, for instance, those heads I sent you, in which I used the deeper black.

I hope everything will turn out well, but from this little scratch, you see it is so simple that it must turn out well.

How miserably the modern houses are constructed nowadays, compared to what they might be if they tried to make them a little more cosy. Compare a window of this time with one of the time of Rembrandt. At that time, everyone seemed to feel the need of a peculiar tempered light, which now doesn't seem to exist any longer, at least they seem to aim at making it cold, harsh and unfeeling.





is normal and speedy. But that doesn't always come so quickly and readily, and there is almost always some complication or other, at least one must always be very careful.

Last week, I read again "Notre Dame" by Victor Hugo, which I had read already, ten years ago. Do you know what I found in it, at least thought I found in it, so that I do not doubt Victor Hugo meant such a thing? In Quasimodo I found Thys Maris.

Probably most people who read "Notre Dame" have the impression that Quasimodo was a kind of fool. But as I do, you would not find Quasimodo ridiculous, and you would feel as I do, the truth of what Hugo says, "Pour ceux qui savent que Quasimodo a existé, maintenant 'Notre Dame' est vide. Car non seulement il en était l'habitant mais il en était l'âme."

Taking "Notre Dame" as a symbol for that tendency in art, which forms its expression, for instance, in Leys and de Groux (sometimes), and Lagye, Devriendt and Henri Pille, one can apply to Thys Maris the words: "Maintenant il y a un vide pour ceux qui savent qu'il a existé, car il en était l'âme, et l'âme de cet art-là c'était lui." Well, Thys Maris exists still, but not in his full splendour and strength, not unscathed and disenchanted *in so far as he can be disenchanted*.

One of the most stupid things of the painters here, is that even now they laugh at Thys Maris. I think that as terrible as suicide. Why as suicide? Because Thys Maris is so much the personification of everything high and noble, that in my opinion a painter cannot mock at him without lowering himself. He who doesn't understand Maris, so much the worse for him, those who have understood him, mourn for him, and regret that such a man has been broken. "Noble lame, vil fourreau," that is applicable to Thys Maris and to Quasimodo. "Dans mon âme je suis beau."

Well, write soon, if you haven't done so already. And believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.



Dear Theo,

Just a little word to tell you I received your letter and to thank you for it.

And I was very glad to hear the good tidings about your patient. That's good.

In every love there are different phases—and when the woman recovers, it will be quite different again—and that is something delightful too. The principal thing is to continue and to keep on, he who wants variety must remain faithful. And he who wants to know many women must stick to one and the same.

Spring is coming fast here.

For the moment the studio is in a terrible mess.

Enclosed a little scratch, made in a hurry, on a scrap of paper, while they put up the shutters I spoke about. Why did I send it to you, unimportant as it is, in its unfinished condition? Because I believe you will see one thing clearly from it, that now I can get quite a different effect of light in my studio than the too strong light of those three large windows.

The window Number 1 in the scratch is closed at the bottom, and the rest partly so—it now looks like the door of a little room in an almshouse, for instance.

Window Number 2 is closed at the top, and looks like a window before which the figures are sitting.

The background to the left is dark, for window Number 3 is quite closed.

Just think of the difference between the effect of crude light, which the three windows would give at this moment, without the shutters, and you will understand how infinitely better I can work now. Beside the light that streamed in, there was before an enormous reflection which neutralized all effects.

It often made me desperate, when, for instance, I saw a woman rummaging around in a small room, and found in the figure something typical and mysterious, which absolutely disappeared when I had the same woman in the studio.

So the old man, also, was much more beautiful in a dark passage than in my studio.

And that was very aggravating, and the space the three windows

took up was so large that it couldn't be sufficiently tempered by screens or cardboard.

But now I am going to overcome all that.

However indistinct the little sketch may be, it has been taken from nature, in a tearing hurry, while they were working at the window, and you will see from it that one can get fine effects now, and vary greatly, and I sent you this rather than explain the thing by words.

Well, the light in the studio is now somewhat under my control, and when I have seen a little figure in some other house, I can easily find it back at home, if I pay attention to the way the light strikes it, and regulate my light accordingly. How great was the quantity of light? Did it strike the figure in front, behind, to the right or left, from above or from beneath?

I think it will please you when you come. The closet is also excellent. It has been rather a difficult job, as the shutters were too large for the windows and had to be cut off. But now everything is finished so far, and only now can I really enjoy the studio, and is it, in fact, in harmony with what I want. Later on, perhaps, they will make me another little room in the attic—when there is some old timber again. They could make quite a picturesque and curious little room there, but that is of secondary importance.

But the studio is ten times better.

However, the expenses have been rather more than I expected, as so much had to be altered in the old blinds.

Therefore I must ask you, as I have promised some payment for the first of March—if you can, send it rather a day sooner than later? I know you will understand that the studio has been quite changed by it; oh, I am so glad about it, it has worried me so, because I couldn't get it right.

I spoke of the good tidings about your patient, but that she wants to go back to her own country doesn't seem quite right to me, but as you say, little can be said about the future, before she has recovered. May spring do her good!

Well, boy, I write in a hurry, as I still have a great deal of cleaning up to do, I am so very happy about that improvement of the windows.

As far as I can judge now, it is quite effective. You remember from your visit last summer, how the light was too crude, and

couldn't be changed. From this little sketch you will probably understand how it can be infinitely varied and the effects one sees in little houses can be reproduced here. And the advantage is then, that in the small houses one has not enough distance to draw the figures, and in the studio one has.

Adieu, with a firm handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I think I shall probably dream to-night of fellows in sou'westers and oilskins, on which the light falls and makes piquant high lights, which accentuate the form.

270

Dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the enclosure. I think the tidings about your patient are very favourable. I am glad for you, the recovery from that anæmia is decidedly a result of reviving hope and vitality, through meeting with sympathy and kindness.

The heart that is fainting  
May grow full to o'erflowing  
And they who behold it  
Shall wonder and know not  
That God at his fountains  
Far off has been raining.

Now you will have received already—at least I sent it yesterday afternoon—a very rough sketch of a water-colour.

This, in answer to your question about that.

It has not been made recently however. A few months ago I started it, and since then gave it a few touches now and then. But it remained in a crude condition. Since then, I made a large number of studies, that is, drawings of the figure, and especially of heads. Just with a view to such a scene as this sketch represents, which must be finished by bringing character and effect, especially in heads, hands and feet. Why I send them to you is because you will see in them more clearly than in many others I made till now in water-colour, that I have a strong, good eye for colour—that I see

them fresh, through a grey haze. However unfinished and defective it may be, this is a bit of street as I want to represent the Geest or the Jewish quarter. This sketch didn't come off accidentally, all kinds of scenes I see, I can finish so far, and get those relatively strong effects of colour and tone. Now if you compare this drawing with the *lithographs* and *drawings of heads* I sent you this winter, you can clearly see my aim from those different *failures*.

The large studies of heads, for instance, of which I have still many others, for instance with sou'westers, with shawls and white bonnets and top-hats and caps, they must serve for such compositions as the one I sent you now.

But I shall have to make many more failures still, for I believe that in water-colour much depends on great dexterity and quickness of touch. One must work in it before it is dry, to get harmony, and one hasn't much time for reflection then. So the principal thing is not the finishing of each one at the time, no, one must put down those twenty or thirty heads rapidly and one after the other. Here follow a few curious sayings about water-colours: "L'aquarelle est quelque chose de diabolique," and the other is by Whistler, who said: "Yes, I have done that in two hours, but I've studied for years in order to be able to accomplish this in two hours."

Enough of this, I love water-colour too well ever to give it up entirely, I come back to it again and again. But the foundation of everything is the knowledge of the figure, so that one can draw readily men and women and children in every possible action. So that is my chief aim, which cannot be reached by any other way I think.

And I try to work myself up to a higher point of knowledge and ability in general, rather than to care very much about the finishing off some particular sketch. After having drawn for a month, I make, now and then, a few water-colours, for instance, by way of throwing out the plummet to fathom my depth. I see then each time that I have got over some obstacles but that new difficulties again arise. Then I begin to drudge anew to conquer those.

As to the colours, they are really all used up, and not only that, but through some relatively great expenses, I am not only hard up, but absolutely penniless.



Spring is coming and I should like to take up painting again too. So that is partly the reason I am not working in water-colour just now.

But indirectly I am always working at it, and by the change in the studio, now that I can study better the effects of clare-obscure I shall work more and more with the brush even in Black and



White drawings, and wash the shadows in with neutral tint, sepia, India ink, Cassel earth, and accentuate the lights with Chinese white.

Do you remember that last summer you brought me pieces of hard crayon? I tried then to work with it, but it didn't work well. So a few pieces were left, which I picked up the other day; you'll find enclosed a scratch done with it; you see it is a warm peculiar black. You would greatly oblige me by bringing some more of it with you this summer.



It has a great advantage—the firm pieces are much easier to keep in hand while sketching than a little stick of *conté*, which is hard to hold and which breaks every moment. So for sketching outdoors it is delightful.

Well, lad—it is difficult to write it all, and I wanted to answer your question about water-colour not only in words. I should not want anybody to see only this one sketch of mine, because in this sketch, I myself think nothing is right, but the general aspect, and I will wrestle with the figures till I get in water-colour that which they begin to get in lithography, that is, more character and effect.

It is not pleasant to make sketches like the one I sent you, and



then not to be able to finish them; I hate that so much, that I rarely make them, only by way of trial, to see if I have made any progress. But now I have new courage and interest, just because I have been making a great many studies again.

I think the change in the studio will help to push me on, not the first day, but after a few months' struggling.

I now can partly study perfectly well at home, with models, such effects as the water-colour I sent you.

Here the windows are closed at the bottom so that the light on the group of figures falls from above.

In this way I can group them in the studio and then I get, for instance, the high lights on the heads of the figures.

Like in this water-colour.

I have tried it already with the old man, the woman and the children, it gives *splendid* effects. The desire to make them is not wanting, but I expect new failures, which I hope, however, will have *something* in them rather to encourage than to make one lose courage, though they are failures.

Out of the money you sent I had to pay so many things at once, and I wish you could send some more, but arrange it as best you can, I have so much work now that I can vary it just as I like. I long very much for your coming, just to show you the studies and to talk about the work.

Adieu, thanks again. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

271

Dear Theo,

I enclose a little sketch which I made in the soup kitchen. They sell the soup in a large passage where the light falls, from above, through a door to the right.

Now I tried to find that same effect in the studio. In the background I put a white screen, and on that I drew the window, according to its real proportions and measurements, I closed the furthest window entirely, and the middle window at the bottom, so that the light falls from P, exactly as in the place itself.

You see when I have the models posing there, I get exactly the same effect as in the real soup kitchen.

In the sketch above, you see the grouping in the studio. I drew a line around the part I wanted to draw. Of course I can study the poses of the figures, as long and as much and as correctly as I like. Still keeping true in general to what I have seen.

I should like to try this again in water-colour for instance, and work hard on it to make it more finished. It seems to me that there is more opportunity for figure painting in the studio now. Before the change, when I tried it last summer, the figures got such a



neutral, cold tone, that one didn't feel strongly the inclination to paint them. The picturesqueness disappeared, so to say, as soon as they came in that strong light.

Do you know what I shall still need very much? Different pieces of grey or brown cloth, to get the right shade of background.

In the above sketch the wall is white, with wainscot painted in grey, the floor darker. By paying attention to those things, one gets the local colour still so much more correctly. I have a few of these things already and also many *real typical* clothes. Yesterday, for instance, I bought a very picturesque, patched smock, of coarse linen. I always look out for such things; by paying some

attention to them, the models give more satisfaction than if one leaves it all to chance. I love my studio as a sailor loves his boat.

I know that in time it will become just what I want, but my purse doesn't always allow me to do what I should like. But the things which one buys, in this way, are things that last, and *now* I have a chance which perhaps I wouldn't have again afterwards.

The change in the studio brings me still more expenses, indirectly rather than directly, for I don't think it finished before I have many more things which are necessary to make it practical. Your patient will cause you a great deal of expense; if you cannot send any extra just now, I needn't stop my work because of that.

Besides, not long ago you did send some extra, so I take it for granted that I will pull through if necessary. But I have a burning desire in me to push on, and to make progress. There is another thing spurring me on, namely, that Rappard also works at full speed, more than he used to do, and I want to keep up with him, because then we'll get on better together and can profit more from each other.

He has painted much more than I, and has drawn longer, but we are both just about on the same level. I don't try to compete with him as a painter, but I will not let him beat me in drawing. I wish that in the future he and I would keep working in the same direction, that is, types from the people, scenes in a soup kitchen, hospital, etc., and he has promised to come and see me one of these days, and I wish I could make some arrangement with him about the making of a series of drawings from the people, which we should lithograph *when they were good enough*—not before.

This and many other things, gives me a strong desire to push on vigorously.

*At all events*, whether you can send me something or not, I can promise you better drawings ere long.

The change in the studio itself, in so far as it is finished now, enables me to undertake some new things already.

But there would be fewer obstacles in the way, if you could send me something extra just now. I am afraid otherwise I would be checked by some things, either by the lack of drawing materials or by not being able to take models, or the making of a few more changes.

I speak of "better drawings," that is spoken relatively.

Among the studies of heads—old men, etc., which I still have here, there are some which I will not be able to improve at once, because there is some touch of nature in them, and something with which I am, of course, not quite satisfied, but of which I dare not say “I shall make it better in a few days.”

But with better drawings, I mean something different, that is, drawn from a different point of view, and with more clare-obscure in them, of which there is little or none in my studies of this winter. And one thing I can promise you now at all events, to-morrow I'll have the house full of people, that is, the woman's mother, and her younger sister, and a boy from the neighbourhood, and all these persons together with my own people, will pose for the drawing of which this is the first little sketch.

Rappard always works with models, too, and in my opinion there is no better way. Especially if one keeps to one model, one finds more and more qualities in it. So this letter completes the one of yesterday, in so far that you will see from it that to-day I made a plan for a new water-colour, of the same kind I sent you, and that to-morrow I will have the models for it. I hope to finish this one, more than the one I sent you. Shall I succeed??? I cannot tell beforehand.

I started, though I am still short of a few things. But one thing I have that I didn't have before, and that is the better light. And that is worth more to me than ever so much paint. If I can have the paint also, please give it to me, but I have had so many things from you already, and am so little satisfied about the result, till now, in many respects, that I scarcely dare ask for it. As, in algebra, the product of two negatives is a positive, so I hope that the result of *failures* may become *success*.

Adieu. My best wishes for your patient, or rather, your convalescent.

Yours,

Vincent.

272

Dear Theo,

It is just getting dark, and for curiosity sake I send you the drawing of to-day, because I wrote you about it. This morning I began

a water-colour of a boy and a girl, in such a soup kitchen, with another woman's figure in a corner. That water-colour became too blurred, which was partly the fault of the paper, which was not suited for it.

But I saw how infinitely much better the studio now is for colour, and of course I will not stop at this first experiment. But so the morning passed away, and I spent the afternoon in making a drawing with crayon, the one piece that was left from this summer. I sent you the drawing by the same mail. I don't think it finished enough, but as a sketch from life there is perhaps some life in it, and some human sentiment. By and by better things will follow.



This drawing leaves the question of water-colours still undecided, but gives a provisional answer to what you wrote about the little sketch I sent you, to give you an idea of the effect of the windows in the studio.

Will you do me a *very great* favour, then send me a few pieces of that crayon by mail.

There is in that crayon a soul and life—conté pencil is dead I think. Two violins may look the same from the outside, but in playing on them, one sometimes finds in the one a beautiful tone, which the other has not.

That crayon now, has much tone or depth. I could almost



say, that crayon knows what I want, it listens with intelligence and obeys, and the conté pencil is indifferent and unwilling.

The crayon has a real gypsy soul; if it isn't asking too much of you, send me some of it.

Who knows, if now, with the better light, and the crayon, and the lithographic chalk, I shall not succeed in making something for illustrations. *Actualities*—that was what they asked—if they mean by that such things as, for instance, illuminations for the king's birthday, I would care very little for it—but if the gentlemen managers would consent to range under actualities, scenes from the daily life of the people, I would gladly try my utmost to make them.

When I have some of that crayon again, I will make a few more figures of almshouse men.

And from those soup kitchens, of which this is the first, you will get some quite different compositions still.

You will find this size perhaps rather too large, but I think after having worked sometime, still with models, I shall succeed in making the figures so strong that it won't matter about their being large, and it will be even better so. That need not prevent my making smaller ones, and I can always reduce. There is in this rough sketch much that I do not like, but I know, for sure, that in a short time I shall make progress.

Can you not understand when you see this group of people together that I feel at home with them?

Sometime ago I read in "Felix Holt the Radical" by Eliot, the following words, "The people I live among have the same follies and vices as the rich, only they have their own forms of folly and vice—and they have not what are called the refinements of the rich to make their faults more bearable."

It doesn't much matter to me—I am not fond of those refinements, but some people are, and find it difficult to feel at home with such persons as have them not.

I wouldn't have thought of it in these terms, but I have felt the same sometimes.

As a painter I not only feel perfectly at home and contented with them, but I find in them a character that reminds me sometimes of gypsies, at least something as picturesque.

As I have been writing so often lately, I shall probably not write again before the tenth, don't send me the money later, if



possible, for I promised Leurs to pay off something about that time, which I must do before I can get some new things which I shall need.

For instance, I intend to buy, at what they call wholesale price, several things which he has had for a long time, and will let me have cheaply. Especially a number of sheets of water-colour paper, of a rough kind, which is not in demand any longer, but which I like better than the smooth one. You would do me a great favour by sending that crayon.

Adieu, my very best wishes, especially for your patient. Believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

273

Dear brother,

I didn't intend to write so soon again—but as you know I am trying to make different kinds of drawings. And now to-day again, I made another sketch with the rest of that little piece of crayon—and afterwards washed in it with sepia. I think I find in crayon all kinds of qualities which make it an excellent means to express things from nature. This morning I took a walk outside the town, in the meadows behind the Zuidbuitensingel where Maris first lived, and where the public dumping grounds are. I stood there a long time, looking at a row of the most twisted, gnarled, sorry-looking pollard willows that I have ever seen. They bordered a patch of vegetable garden—freshly dug up—and they were mirrored in a dirty little ditch—very dirty—but in which some blades of spring grass were already sparkling. But that rough brown bark, the freshly spaded earth, in which one could see the fertility, as it were, all that had something so intensely rich in the dark deep tones that reminded me again of the crayon. So that as soon as I have some more of it, I hope to try my hand at landscape.

Though the enclosed sketch is very unfinished, it seemed to me there might be things in it in harmony with your intentions—and it is again a sketch from life. Do not think I consider it a

good quality, if it is not detailed enough—far from it, but the elaborateness which you as well as I should like to see in it doesn't consist so much in details brought in later, but ought to be expressed at once, more than is now the case. For it may not lose its freshness by it, and, if only the impression be correct, there is sometimes expression in even unfinished things. But, of course, I shall try to bring more variation in the tones. “Y mettre des détails” leaves me rather cool, but “dégrossir” is certainly my aim, that is, “serrer la forme de plus près.” Though this sketch is not sufficiently so, that little bit of sepia made so much difference in the general effect that I thought you could see in it, in connection with the one of yesterday, how that crayon can be used in different ways. I wrote yesterday to Rappard about the crayon, because I had to write him about different things of lithography, and as I wanted to send him a few sketches done with it, I used it for some drawings of our baby, in different positions, and I found it is very well fit for sketching too. One also can bring in demi-tones by means of bread-crumbs. Perhaps only the very deepest shadows cannot be very well done with it, but in many cases, one can use lithographic chalk then, which is also very rich in tone.

I think you will see from the figures how the studio has improved as regards the light. How beautiful everything out of doors is these days, don't you think so?

You can imagine that I am full of plans.

You know that I am working on many different things, for I should so much like to know many different techniques, because that is a stimulus to work hard, and it creates new thoughts.

I wish I had thought of that crayon before, for it is preferable to many other things. Neither is it as hard as a *conté* pencil, that is to say, it doesn't scratch so.

I don't ask you to send me some because I could not work without it, but because with it, as well as my usual work I could make many other things.

Did I write you already about those two large etchings by Israël, a man who lights his pipe, and an interior of a workman's home! How beautiful they are. I think it is so splendid of Israël to go on with etching, the more so, because all the others have given it up, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which the etching club started, at the time.

At least most of them haven't made any *progress* in etching, and if they make one now, it is no better or more complete than what they made years ago. But father Israël, notwithstanding his grey hairs, is young enough still to make progress, and great progress, too,—and this I call real youth, and ever fresh energy.

Confound it, if the others had done the same, what beautiful Dutch etchings would have been given to the world. I have two little etchings by Israël, perhaps his very first, a little girl with a spade in a garden, and a woman with a basket on her back ; do you know them ? I believe it is a publication of the Belgian aquafortistes.

So with that little bit of crayon I have already made two sketches, and some small croquis, too, and there is still some left.

I think in the future, perhaps, I will use little else, for the ordinary work.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

274

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter of the ninth of March, and for the enclosed. Is your patient improving ? I hope in this case, “no news is good news.”

If it has been as cold in Paris as it was here last week, it cannot have agreed very well with her.

When you say that you sometimes wish we could talk together more, about different things in art, I for my part, have that longing continually, and sometimes very strongly.

So often, I should like to know your opinion about this or that, about some studies, etc., for instance, if they might be of some use, or if it would be advisable, for some reason or other, to go more deeply into them.

So often I should like to have some more information about things, on which you are better informed than I, and I should like to know more about the state of affairs, I mean what kind of work the painters make. One can write about it to some extent, but

writing takes time, and one does not always get to it, nor can one go enough into detail.

And just now, through a piling up of studies, it would be worth a great deal to me, if we could talk things over together, and I should also like so much to have you see how the studio is improved.

Well let us hope that it will not be so very, very long before you come to Holland.

Know it well, dear brother, how strongly and intensely I feel the enormous debt I owe you for your faithful help.

It would be difficult for me to express all my thoughts about it. It constantly remains a cause of disappointment to me that my drawings are not yet what I wanted them to be. The difficulties are indeed numerous and great, and cannot be overcome at once. To make progress is a kind of miner's work, which doesn't advance as quickly as one would like, and as others also expect, but standing before such a task, the first things that are necessary are patience and faithfulness. In fact, I do not think much about the difficulties, because if one thought of them too much one would get dizzy or upset.

A weaver who has to direct and to interweave a great many little threads has no time to philosophize about it, but rather he is so absorbed in his work that he doesn't think but acts, and he *feels* more how things must go than he can explain it. Even though neither you nor I, in speaking together, would come to some definite plans, etc., perhaps we would mutually strengthen that *feeling* that something is ripening within us. And that is what I should like.

This morning I was at Van der Weele's, who was working at a very beautiful picture of diggers, horses, and sand wagons, large size. It was beautiful in tone and colour, a grey morning haze, it was virile in drawing and composition, there was style and character in it—well, it was by far the most beautiful and strongest thing of his I ever saw. He had also painted three very beautiful serious studies of an old white horse, and also a beautiful little landscape in the dunes.

This week, he will probably look in at my studio; which I should like very much indeed.

Last week, I met Breitner in the street; his position in Rotter-

dam frees him from much anxiety; however, Van der Weele had just a little note from him this morning, that he was ill again. To tell you the truth, the impression I had, when I saw him again, was not very favourable; he had an air of disappointment, and he spoke in rather a queer way about his work.

Now I have to tell you still about the surprise I have had. I received a letter from father, very cordial and cheerful, it seemed to me, with twenty-five guilders enclosed. Father wrote he had received some money, on which he had no longer counted, and he wanted me to share in it. Wasn't that nice of him, however, it quite embarrasses me.

But, involuntarily, a thought came into my mind. Can it be, perhaps, that father has heard, from someone or other, that I was very hard up? I hope that this was not his motive, for I think this idea of my circumstances would not be correct. And it might give father anxieties which would be quite out of place. You will understand my meaning better than father would if I should try to explain it to him.

In my opinion, I am often *rich as Cræsus*, not in money, but (though it doesn't happen every day) rich, because I have found in my work something to which I can devote myself with heart and soul, and which gives inspiration and zest to life.

Of course my moods vary, but I have a certain average serenity. I have a certain *faith* in art, a certain confidence that it is a powerful stream, which drifts a man to the harbour, though he himself must do his bit too, and, at all events, I think it such a great blessing, when a man has found his work, that I cannot count myself among the unfortunate. I mean, I may be in certain, relatively, great difficulties, and there may be gloomy days in my life, but I shouldn't want nor would it be correct to be counted among the unfortunate.

You write in your letter something which I sometimes *feel also*: "Sometimes I do not know how I shall pull through."

Look here, I often feel the same, *in more than one respect*, not only in *financial* things, but in *art* itself, and in *life* in general. But do you think that something exceptional? Don't you think every man with a little pluck and energy has those moments?

Moments of melancholy, of distress, of anguish, I think we all have them, more or less, and it is a condition of every *conscious* human life. It seems, some people have no self-consciousness.



But those who have it, they may sometimes be in distress, but for all that they are not unhappy, nor is it something exceptional that happens to them.

And sometimes there comes relief, sometimes there comes new inner energy, and one rises from it, till at last, some day, one perhaps doesn't rise any more, *que soit*, but that is nothing extraordinary, and I repeat it, *such is the common human fate, in my opinion.*

Father's letter was an answer to a letter of mine, which I remember quite well was very cheerful, for I told him in it about the change in the studio, and I did not write anything to father that could give rise to thoughts of my being in any difficulties, either financial or otherwise. In fact, father doesn't write anything about it, and his letter is very cheerful and cordial, but the money came so unexpectedly that involuntarily the thought came into my head, can it be that father is worried about me? If I am mistaken in this, it would be very much out of place to write as if that were the principal impression his kindness has made upon me. The principal impression being that I feel very grateful for having received something which enables me to do several things that otherwise I couldn't have done. But I tell you my thoughts about it, because in case you should perceive that father worried about me, you would be better able than I to reassure father.

At the same time, you see from this, that I have had a real stroke of luck. I intend to spend it on getting my water-colour things in good shape. I will pay off Leurs and will be able to arrange different things in the studio, in order to make it still more practical.

It sometimes seems to me, that the prices of different painting and drawing materials are terribly screwed up. So that it thwarts many a one from painting. One of my ideals would be that there would be more institutions like the *Graphic*, for instance, where people who want to work can find all materials, on condition of certain apparent ability and energy.

Like Cadart, at the time, enabled many a one to etch, who wouldn't have been able to etch, because of the expenses, if he had had to pay them from his own pocket.

I am privileged above many others, but I cannot do everything which I would have the courage and energy to undertake. The

expenses are so extensive, beginning with a model and food and housing, and ending with different colours and brushes.

And that is also like a weaving loom, where the different threads must be kept apart.

But we all have to bear up against the same thing—but just because everyone who paints, or draws, has to bear it, and if alone would almost sink down under it, why shouldn't more painters join hands, to work together, like soldiers in the rank and file, and why, especially, are those branches of art, which are least expensive, so much despised?

As to the crayon, I do not know whether that which you gave me came from the Plaats, but I am quite sure that you gave it to me at your visit of last summer, or *perhaps still in Etten*. In a drug store I found a few remnants, perhaps six pieces, but all in small bits. Please keep it in mind. When I asked Leurs again for it, he told me that Jaap Maris had asked him so often for it.

I have made two sketches with it again, a cradle, and one like that I sent you already, in which I washed a great deal with sepia. As to what you write about that one sketch, of those two figures, the one above the other, it is especially an effect of perspective. And also of the great difference in size between the little child and the woman on the basket.

What I, myself, dislike more than that line of the composition is something which, in fact, you also have noticed, that the two figures are too much in one tone, which is partly the fault of the crayon, which does not express all shades, and one should like to strengthen it with lithographic chalk, for instance. But I think that the principal reason is that I do not always have time enough to work as elaborately as I should like. If one works a long time on a drawing, it is possible to go more into detail, to seek the different tones. But too often I must work in a hurry. I dare not ask too much from my models. If I paid them better, I should have the right to demand longer poses, and could make better progress.

Now, I often think I get more from them in return than I pay them in money.

However, I do not mean to say that there is not a still more important reason, namely, that I must become more clever than I am before I can be ever so little satisfied with myself. And by

and by, I hope to make better and more elaborate things in the same time which I now spend on them.

Well, brother, my best wishes for your patient, I long sometimes for another description of an aspect of Paris from you, and—rest assured I'll make shift as best I can, with what your faithful help gives me—that I try and try to make even a better use of it, and especially that I blame myself if I cannot manage to do what I want with it. Adieu, with a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Many hearty thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I was glad to hear again some more details about your patient, the more so as the news seemed to be very favourable.

What you write about her influence on other people is very charming. Such things I believe are true, the influence exerted by a good person is far-reaching sometimes. It has been, curiously enough, compared to leaven. Two good people—man and woman combined—with the same aim and intentions, actuated by the same serious purpose, what could they not accomplish!

I have often thought of that.

For, by co-operating, the power of goodness is not only doubled, but multiplied many times, as by involution, to use a mathematical term. Well—your description of the house and its surroundings, the cab-stand, is very good; it has a more typical atmosphere than your other descriptions of the city, the cab-stand is excellent, can I not have that personage with the red nose pose for me some day?

I am glad you saw our friend Wisselingh again, so he has come back to Paris, *is he still in the firm Cottier?*

Will you give him my best regards, sometime, if he comes to Holland, a visit from him would give me great pleasure, indeed, he has already promised me as much. I wish you could remind him of it, so that he won't forget it. I should like to ask him several things about London. Did he still see my lithographs? I should like to renew his acquaintance, I always thought him very attractive

and he knows many things, and has original and just sentiments in things of art, in short, he is a man of character.

Enclosed scratch is from a drawing which I started early this morning, and I worked on it the whole day. Perhaps it is the best one I've made up till now, at least in light and shadow. I send you the little sketch, because I think you will see from it how much I gained by the change of the light in the studio; but it is impossible to work on this paper, so that it gets the same values, though it is out of proportion and though the drawing has more foreground. This figure is posed against the light, and to render it, one needs more than an outline, because, as the light falls from one window the modelling becomes stronger, and the values get in harmony with each other and in mutual relation, and from this conception, results, in the first place: the rendering of the difficulties one has before one's eyes, but at the same time another thing, which is rather difficult, that is, the question of posing a figure so, and letting the light fall, so that it renders the character most completely and entirely. That which one sees out of doors or inside, must be analysed as regards the light, so that one can find the same effect again.

I'm very glad to hear you found the crayon. It didn't arrive by to-day's post however, though you wrote you have sent it. If you have forgotten it, I remind you of it again, and if you have already sent it, it will certainly arrive soon. I have a new stock of lithographic chalk, and am going to combine it with crayon, which I think *must* give good results.

This week I was very busy drawing wheelbarrows; a little fellow seen from the back, came out quite well, I think. Van der Weele came to see me, and we had an exhibition of woodcuts, seated cosily on a wheelbarrow, for I was just working with a model. He will begin to collect them, too, and will try to get some from the collection of the late Stam, the wood-engraver. I didn't tell you yet, that I have almost the whole *Graphic* complete now, from the very beginning in 1870.

Of course, not everything, there is too much chaff, but the best things from it. When one sees, for instance, the work of Herkomer arranged together, instead of spread out between many insignificant things, it is, in the first place, more easy and pleasant to look at them, but, at the same time, one learns to distinguish the

characteristics of the different masters, and the great difference between the draughtsmen.

How I should love to see something of Lhermitte's.

I cannot tell you enough how happy I am with the change in the studio, and how full I am of all kinds of figures, which I want to make.

Van der Weele saw, among other things, the studies of the heads of this winter. I am sure they will be of use to me later on, the same as the other studies too. Do you know what pleased me this winter, you remember Van der Weele already came to see me months ago, I was then making studies of diggers, from one of which I tried to make a lithograph.

He saw them at the time but they didn't seem to interest him, decidedly not. Now, for the picture at which he is working, he has either had diggers pose for him of late, or he has observed them while they were at work, in fact he has closely studied diggers from nature.

Now, in looking over my studies, when we came to the diggers, he spoke quite differently about them than he did last winter; at least he didn't say quite so readily "this or that is not right." I myself didn't speak about them at all, this time. But more and more I begin to notice in myself, as well as in others, how often one is mistaken in thinking, this or that "*is not so*," or "*that's not correct*," how often one says it where it doesn't apply, I myself do it no less than others. One thinks one knows it for sure, and yet if one wants to be honest, one must take it back.

Your description of the cab-stand and the old urinal, with the posters on it, is really very good, it's a real pity you do not draw it.

Speaking of posters, the place where they are posted is sometimes a queer parody on the posters themselves, or the reverse.

For instance, to quote one among many, over the entrance of the pawn-shop, I saw posted in large characters:

" Prospectus  
'Hearth and Home' "

N.B.—"Hearth and Home" is a magazine, as you know perhaps. I thought it rather good; in paying more attention one might find still better ones.

Gavarni once made something of it, it was the entrance to a





house, over which was written, "On prend des enfants en sevrage." On the steps a woman of very unfavourable appearance and a fellow with a pipe in his mouth, apparently the owners of the institution, were standing. Against the wall a poster was painted: "*Perdu un enfant, tel et tel.*"

Another one is: "Au rendez-vous de la fraternité," the sign of an inn where a few tipsy fellows are tussling.

Rappard is going to send a large picture to the Amsterdam exhibition. It represents four tile painters around a table. Indirectly I heard much good said about it. Now, though it is not my intention to make large pictures for exhibitions, yet I wouldn't like the work less than Rappard, for instance.

I find even something animating about the thought that one works in one direction, the other in another, and that yet one still sympathizes. Competition, when it proceeds from jealousy, is quite a different thing from trying one's best to make the work as good as possible, *for the sake of mutual respect*. "*Les extrêmes se touchent.*" I do not see any good in jealousy, but I would despise a friendship which did not call for some exertion from both sides, to keep on the same level.

The thing I begin to long very much for is to work with more models at a time. To make drawings that are somewhat more complicated.

But the longing for it is not too intense, I have enough to do even so.

I saw at Van der Weele's the *studies* for his large picture. Those studies were excellent—conscientiously made, but he who understands a little how studies from nature are made, and knows the difference between these and the picture or definite composition, of course doesn't expect to find the picture in the studies.

The greatness and unity of the picture is not found in the studies, no wonder; because the studies are made for the figures, either horses or men, that doesn't matter, the surroundings are neglected, for instance, there is not background or foreground enough, etc. They do not stand out and are not *in their right place as they are in the picture*. Does everybody understand that on seeing studies? I hope you will keep it in mind in seeing mine, especially, when, sooner or later, you will see those I still have here. This week for fun I sketched a few in different proportions, so that I can dash

down a composition of it. By the simple indication of a few lines, and washing in a few flat tones in sepia, the thing that I would call picturesqueness came by itself. What I want to say is this, do not think I look at nature with a different eye with regard to space, than, for instance, Van der Weele does.

Adieu. Write soon again, best wishes,

Yours,

Vincent.

In this little sketch you see something of which I spoke at the end of this letter. Now, here is no foreground at all, though in the real study there is a little more of it, but if I combined this study, for instance, with one of the diggers, let us say the one of the lithograph, then there belongs to it a large patch of ground in front, and, for instance, a woody stretch behind it, where, quite at the top, a bit of sky would be visible, just to indicate where the light comes from. So that it perhaps becomes a composition in the breadth, and then the figure comes in its surroundings and in its place.

If I made all this on the study itself, the figure would become so small that it would be of no use to me, as a serious study of the figure. Believe me, the *aspect* is not the hardest thing, if my studies are good, I am quite confident of the rest.

And space, atmosphere, broadness, are things which you mustn't think I neglect, but one mustn't *begin* with them, first the foundation, then the roof follows in time.

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Dear Theo,

So often your descriptions gave me a glimpse of Paris, this once I give you a peep through my window on the snowy yard.

I add a view of the corner of the house, and they are two impressions of one and the same winter day.

Poetry surrounds us everywhere, but to bring it on paper is, alas, not so easy as to look at it.

I take this scratch from a water-colour I made, which, however, I do not think strong and vivid enough.

I think I wrote you already that I found some of that crayon

here in town, I am using that also. Those cold days of last week have been the most typical part of this winter, I think.

It was wonderfully beautiful with the snow and peculiar skies. But to-day the thawing of the snow was perhaps even more beautiful.

But it was *typical* winter weather, if I may call it so—it was that



kind of weather that rouses old memories, and makes the most ordinary things have a look that involuntarily reminds one of stories of the time of coaches and post-chaises.

Enclosed, for instance, a little scratch I made in just such a





dreamy mood. It represents a gentleman, who, having missed a coach, has been obliged to spend the night in a village inn. Now he got up early in the morning, and while he orders a glass of brandy against the cold, he pays the landlady (a woman in a peasant's cap), it is still very early in the morning, "la piquette du jour," he must catch the mail coach, the moon is still shining, and through the window of the inn parlour one sees the snow glittering and every object has a peculiar, whimsical cast-shadow. This little story is of no importance whatever, neither is the

little sketch, but through one and the other, you will perhaps understand what I mean, that is, that everything of late has a certain air, which gives one a longing to dash it down on paper. All nature is an indescribably beautiful "Black and White" exhibition at the time of those snow effects.

As I am making scratches, anyhow, I'll add another, very hastily done, of a drawing in chalk, the little girl beside the cradle, done in the same way as the woman and the baby, about which you wrote. Indeed that crayon is a curious material. The other little scratch of a skipper, is after a drawing in which much has been washed with neutral tint and sepia.

It wouldn't astonish me at all, if the little I sent you lately seems to you a rather meagre result. I even believe





that it could hardly be otherwise. It is a fatal thing that in order to see the characteristics of work in "Black and White" one must always take in consideration the whole, and it is not always possible to do so.

I mean there is a certain difference in making ten drawings or making a hundred drawings or sketches or studies.

Of course, not because of the quantity, let the quantity be, but I want to say this, there is in "Black and White" a certain facility, which enables one to draw the selfsame figure which one admires in perhaps ten different poses, where in water-colour, for instance, or in painting, one would only make one pose of it. Suppose of those ten, nine are bad, I really hope the proportion of good and bad ones will not always be so, but suppose it, for once. If you, yourself, were in the studio, I believe no week would pass that I wouldn't show you not one, but a certain number of studies, and it would astonish me if, from the certain number, you wouldn't pick out some every time that attracted you.

While the rest wouldn't have been made quite in vain, because in some respects unsuccessful studies prove some day or other to have their use and value for some new composition.

And therefore I believe that when you come here again, you will find some more things about which you can give me some hints, perhaps. For instance, it's very difficult for me, not knowing *at all* the drawings of Lhermitte (you remember I asked you about them) and knowing the water-colours of Ciceri, and also his old lithographic drawing examples, but not knowing at all his drawings in "Black and White," of the present time, I repeat, it is rather difficult for me to understand exactly your meaning, when you write in reference to a certain little sketch: "Couldn't you make something which would correspond somewhat with the above-mentioned drawings." I am quite sure that both those artists are infinitely more advanced than I am, but still, that idea of yours might be realized—I think I, too, shall make some progress in time, shall I not? That certainly is not impossible, and I wanted to tell you once more that, in my opinion, if once I have made something that is fit for it, there is in "Black and White," a certain facility which would enable one to become very productive in that once-found direction. Of course not without continually exerting myself, but I do that anyhow.

So if the little drawings in crayon, which I sent you, are not according to your intention, though I remembered your hints when I made them, don't let it discourage you, and come back to the same subject, the more the better. And know also that, if once I have caught your intention, I would, for instance, be ready to do as I said just now, make ten to have one that was good. Well, if you come some day in the studio, I think you will see that I have a certain activity, and I hope you believe that of me, don't you, and that you also understand that though somebody who possesses a certain activity, works hard even when his work has no direct destination, it would be twice as stimulating if one could find a destination for it. For instance, perhaps, for magazines.

Lately, I read again with great pleasure Fritz Reuter's "Dried Herbs," that is exactly like, for instance, Knaus or Vautier. Do you know a certain draughtsman Regamey? there is much character in his work, I have some woodcuts of his, among others, drawings made in prison, and gypsies and Japanese. When you come, you must also see the woodcuts again, I've gotten some new ones since then.

Perhaps it will seem to you as if the sunshine is brighter, and as if everything has got a new charm. At least, I believe this always is the result of a deep love, and that is a beautiful thing. And I believe people are wrong who think love prevents one from thinking clearly, for just then, one thinks very clearly and is more active than before. And love is something eternal, in aspect it may change, but not in essence. There is the same difference in a person before and after he is in love, as between an unlighted lamp and one that is burning. The lamp was there and it was a good lamp, but now it sheds light too, and that is its real function. And love makes one more calm about many things, and in that way, one is more fit for one's work.

How beautiful those little old almshouses are here. I cannot find words to describe them. And though Israëls does it in a perfect way, I think it strange that relatively so few have an eye for it. I see here at the Hague, so to say, every day, a world which many people pass by, and which is quite different from what most of the painters make. And I wouldn't dare to say so, if I didn't know by experience, that even figure painters really *pass it by*, and if I didn't remember having walked with them and if some figure that

we met struck me, I heard repeatedly: "Oh, those dirty people!" or "That kind of people!" in short, expressions which one would not have expected from a painter.

Yes, that often made me wonder; I remember, among others, a conversation with Henkes, who often had and has such a good eye, however, but who greatly astonished me. It seems as if they purposely avoid the most serious, the most beautiful things, in short, that they voluntarily muzzle themselves, and clip their own wings. And though, for some, I get more respect as time goes on, of others I involuntarily think that they will become quite sterile if they continue in the same way. And the old bohemians were very strong on that point, that they were productive. According to some, bohemism was no good, but mind you, there are those who "want to drain the jug and, and, and, the lid will fall on their nose." It is all right to snuff the candle, but to put the extinguisher on before time, is foolish. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

By chance, I have at last seen something of Lhermitte's—a very superficial reproduction in woodcut. It represented a little old woman in a church pew. Beside her a girl was kneeling. However imperfect the reproduction may be, it gave me some idea of his work. It straightway reminded me of de Groux and Legros, there must certainly be many things in common between his work and that of Millet and Breton.

Superficial though the little woodcut was, it stayed for days in my mind, and I think of it still, because, from some things I had heard about Lhermitte, I was eager to see something by him and was looking for it. You remember I wrote you about him à propos a review of the "Black and White" exhibition.

I received the crayon—many thanks—it is very good. But it is softer than the kind you gave me the first time, and the pieces are half as long. I still wish for that harder kind in larger pieces, but still I'm very glad to have this

I made a large drawing with it combined with lithographic crayon.

It is a drawing of a digger—my model was the little old alms-house man you know already—his bald head, bent over the black earth, seemed to me full of a certain significance, reminding, for instance, of “thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow.” Now these drawings of the woman with the spade, and this digger, have *such* an aspect, that one will not think they are made in some intricate way, but rather will not think at all about how they are made.

But I believe that if I had made them with ordinary *conté* pencil it would have got a dull and metallic aspect, which would have made people say at once: “That is not life, that is not nature.”

By certain grey tints, by a certain richness and pith in the black, one avoids that dull and metallic aspect.

And these little things are, in my opinion, worth the trouble of seeking for such material as crayon and lithographic chalk.

I am very glad you sent it.

This morning a painter saw these two drawings, namely, Nakken, who didn’t intend to come to me, but knocked at my door, thinking that Van Deventer lived here, but he lives in another street. I directed him, but asked if he wouldn’t come and look at my studio, which he did. As I was drawing that digger above-mentioned, that was the first thing he saw on the easel, and he said, “that is well-drawn and seriously studied.”

Take those words at face value, without delving down too deeply, but they pleased me anyhow, because I don’t suppose Van Nakken would say that a figure was well-drawn if it were not so. But that’s all I think of it, I write it to you because it was just the drawing made with that crayon I mentioned, and you can see from it that, since you took the trouble to procure it for me, I, for my part, like nothing better than to work with it.

Just how far such drawings would come up to certain *fusains*—*Lhermitte* is an ideal—and to reach that point is still far distant—but to aim at it, that’s the order of the day. Well, when you come, sooner or later, we can talk about it better.

Recently I spoke to Smulders about lithographs; I met him on the street, and he asked me if I didn’t intend to make some again.

Which is just what I should like to do. But I must speak to Rappard about it, and he must see my studies first.

It always seems to me, that one might make of workmen's figures something that had a *raison d'être*.

The lithographs by Emile Vernier after Millet and Corot and Daubigny possess qualities which I highly appreciate. How one would like to talk with somebody who is to such a degree master of his trade. Not with the aim of making reproductions of pictures, but better to understand what may be done in lithography.

Just imagine original drawings with those peculiar greys and that peculiar expression of material. Bodmer has found that, as an artist, he is original, and at the same time, he has what one might call the lithographic colours, or rather the grey gamma. That is relatively something quite different from Gavarni's lithography. Bodmer's are prints that are finished up like pictures. I refer here, not only to Bodmer's real lithographs, like "Au bas Breau" and "Combat de Cerfs" but also to the prints from "Illustration," or "Monde Illustré." But, in my opinion, the respect for the need and longing for advice and correction from others may be no excuse for one's own sitting idle. To say: "I don't need other people," however, is rather hasty, if one would take it as a systematic ground to stick up one's nose at other people.

The act of printing has always seemed to me like a miracle, just such a miracle as the growing up of a tiny seed of grain to an ear. An everyday miracle, even the greater, because it happens every day, one drawing is sown on the stone or the etch-plate, and a harvest is reaped from it.

You will understand that it is something about which I think much, during my work, and that I feel a great love for it? Well, the principal thing for me to do now, is to see to it that the seed (namely, the drawings themselves) become of better quality, it may take more time, but if the harvest becomes better by it, I am satisfied, I always have my eye on that harvest.

Well, write soon again, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I kept back this letter a few days, as to-day, Sunday, I have more time for writing. I am reading "Les Misérables" by Victor



Hugo. A book which I remember of old, but I had a great longing to read it again, just as one can have a great longing to see some certain picture again. It is very beautiful, that figure of Monseigneur Myriel or Bienvenu is sublime.

You spoke in your last letter about "exerting influence," in connection with your patient. That Mgr Myriel reminds me of Corot or Millet, though he was a priest and the other two painters. Because in the painters' world, Corot, and Millet also, or Breton, besides doing their own work, have roused so much energy in others, who wouldn't have reached full development without them. You surely know "Les Misérables," and certainly also, the illustrations which Brion made for it, very good and very appropriate. It is good to read such a book again, I think, for the very reason of keeping some sentiments and ideas alive. Especially that of love for humanity, and of the faith in, and consciousness of, something higher, in short, *quelque chose là-Haut*.

I was absorbed in it for a few hours this afternoon, and then came in the studio, about the time the sun was setting. From the window I looked down on a wide dark foreground—dug-up gardens and fields of warm black earth of very deep tone. Diagonally across it runs a little path of yellowish sand, bordered with green grass and slender, spare little poplars.

The background formed by a grey silhouette of the city, with the round roof of the station, and spires, and chimneys. And, moreover, everywhere, backs of houses, but at that time of the evening, everything is blended in tone. So, considered at large, the whole thing is simply a foreground of black dug-up earth, a path across it, behind it a grey silhouette of the city, with spires, and right above it, almost at the horizon, the red sun. It was exactly like a page of Hugo, and I am sure you would have been struck by it, and that you would describe it better than I. And on seeing it, I thought of you.

I wrote you already that I had made a drawing with the crayon—yesterday I began a second one with it, of a seamstress, especially for the clare-obscur. When you come again to the studio, I think you will see pretty soon that, though I do not speak so much any longer about that plan of making workmen's types for lithography, I still keep it in mind. The fact is, however, that I find it more and more difficult, in this respect, that I want to have my figures much better.

I have a sower—a mower—a woman at the wash-tub—a woman miner—a seamstress—a digger—a woman with a spade—the alms-house men—a *bénédicité*—a fellow with a wheelbarrow full of manure. There are still more, if necessary, but I think you will understand that the very making of them, the looking at the models, the thinking it over, do not make one satisfied with one's work, but just the contrary, that is, one says—yes, that same thing, but better still and more serious.

And I wouldn't think so much about it if I considered it impracticable, but the fact that I have made these drawings already, proves that my longing to make them better is not only an idea, but that I have really struggled hard for it.

And I didn't make any further definite plan, as I think the execution of the drawings much more interesting.

It seems to me that these drawings all aim straight in the direction which you meant, when you recently wrote about it—though they are *far from equalling* those of Lhermitte.—

You will understand that too.

The secret of Lhermitte must be no other, I think, than that he thoroughly knows the figure in general, that is, the sturdy, serious workman's figure, and that he takes his subjects from the very heart of the people. To attain his height—one must not speak about that—one must *work*, and try to come as far as possible. Because speaking about it, would only be presumption on my part, but working for it, would be, on the contrary, a proof of respect, and trust, and faith, in such artists as he.

Have you ever seen anything by an American called Abbey? There is at present in New York a club of draughtsmen, who call themselves the "Tile Club," or the "Tile Painters"; I saw a number of their illustrations among others in a Christmas number of Harper's. I ask you because those gentlemen seem to have been in Paris all at the same time—judging from a page of humoristic sketches by one of them.

Abbey, in my opinion, is by far the most clever. His figures often remind me somewhat of Boughton. Boughton is also a member, or an honorary member of that club, but I think he himself is more serious than all the rest of the club together, and doesn't make so much splurge.

Abbey, however, is very beautiful.

I have a little woman's figure, in the snow, by him, which reminds at the same time of Boughton, and of Heilbuth.

A large pen drawing representing a Christmas at the time of Washington, or a little earlier, recalls, for instance, Henri Pille. He has style, and that's a good thing, but Boughton had the same, he used to have it even more.

I write about it, because I believe you will agree with me that not all Americans are bad. That on the contrary like everywhere else, there also extremes meet, and beside a lot of braggarts and daubers of the most detestable and impossible kind, there are characters who give the effect of a lily or a snowdrop between the thorns.

Now I will go and read a little in "*Les Misérables*," though it is late already, such a book warms one like pictures of Dupré's and old Millet's or some of Descamps' do, it is written with what we call passion.

I saw that a new book of Zola's is out, "*Au Bonheur des Dames*," if I remember well.

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Dear Theo,

I was very glad to get your letter and heartily thank you for what was enclosed. But I am very sorry that probably sending it to me after all inconvenienced you more than you say. I heartily hope that you have got that money back since.<sup>1</sup>

Lately I have been working with printer's ink, which is diluted with turpentine and applied with a brush. It gives very deep tones of black. Diluted with some Chinese white, it also gives good greys. By adding more or less turpentine, one can even wash it in very thinly.

I think it will give good results on that paper that Buhot gave you.

When you are here some time, we'll talk that matter over, and I will show you drawings that might be made on it. A year ago it puzzled me, how to get some very deep tones of black, but in the printer's office I found some.

<sup>1</sup> Theo had loaned some money to a cousin from the Indies.

So now I can penetrate a little farther in seeking for modelling and clare-obscure.

Thanks for your good wishes on my birthday. By chance it was a very pleasant day, as I just had an excellent model for a digger. One thing I can assure you, the work is more and more animating, and it gives me, so to say, more vitality, and then I always think of you, because it is you who make it possible for me to work. That is, without fatal obstacles, without too direct handicaps. Difficulties even sometimes spur one on the more. Now the time has come that we can put more energy into it.

My ideal is to work with more and more models, quite a herd of poor people, to whom the studio would be a kind of harbour of refuge, in winter days, or when they were out of work, or in great need.

Where they knew that there was fire, food and drink for them and a little money to be earned. That is so now, on a very small scale, but I hope it will expand itself.

For the present, I confine myself to a few, and stick to them—I cannot spare one of them, but would have use for some more. You write about some amateurs who possibly would take my work sometime, even though it wouldn't become exactly a current article.

Well, I really believe the same. If I may succeed in putting some warmth and love in my work, it will find its friends. The question is to continue to work.

I am glad your patient is progressing, be it slowly. It is beautiful spring weather here, the evenings are indescribably beautiful. If the weather is so in Paris, it will do her good. Is she up already?

To-day I have the old man again, and must go and prepare my things.

This week I again met Van der Weele, and also expect him here one of these days.

Probably you will be very busy about the Salon. I suppose you cannot promise yet when you will come to Holland, can you?

Have a good time, and if you have a moment to spare, write to me again. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosed fr. 50, which were as welcome as ever, the former as well as the latter. I read with interest what you wrote about your patient. The change in circumstances brought about by her recovery has a more or less critical side, because probably, and you expect it yourself, it will cause opposition in some minds—but let us hope it will not be so. How strange it is, that it must be so. We, ourselves, see such a thing as very simple and natural—something logical—and then we are more or less astonished because others cannot see the motives which brought us to see such a thing. And one would almost conclude that some people have cauterized certain sensitive nerves within them—especially those, which combined, are called conscience. Well, I pity those, they travel through life without compass, in my opinion. One might suppose that in every human being the foundation of everything would be love for humanity. But some pretend that there are better foundations. I'm little curious to know them. The old one having proved to be the right one for so many ages, is sufficient for me. Don't you like this little poem, it is from "Les Misérables":

Si César m'avait donné  
La gloire et la guerre,  
Et qu'il me fallût quitter  
L'amour de ma mère,  
Je dirais au grand César:  
Reprends ton sceptre et ton char,  
J'aime mieux ma mère, o hé,  
J'aime mieux ma mère.

In connection with the time in which this appeared (it is a student's song from the time of the Revolution of '30), the love of my mother stands for the love of the republic, or rather, love of humanity, in other words, simply universal brotherhood.

A woman, no matter how good and noble she may be by nature, if she has no means, and is not protected by her own family, in my opinion, in the present society, she runs a great immediate danger of being drowned in the pool of prostitution. What is more natural



than to protect such a woman, and if it can be done in no other way, if circumstances lead to it, well, then, if *il faut y mettre sa peau*, and marry her.

At least I think one must, on principle, carry on that protection till she is definitely safe, to shield her with one's own breast, as it were. Even without real love?

Perhaps so—then it is a marriage of rationality maybe, but not in the sense of a marriage for selfish reasons. In what I have just said, you will find my thoughts about the question, "How far one may go in helping an unfortunate woman?" The answer is: infinitely. However, in granting that in love, the first and principal thing is to be faithful, I remind you of your own saying, that "Marriage (that is, the civil marriage) is such a queer thing." This saying of yours expresses exactly how it is, and on that point I declare I do not know what is better or worse, to keep to it or not. It is what they call puzzling, it puzzles me, too, and I wish one could leave it out altogether. I think it well said "If one marries, one doesn't marry only the woman herself, but the whole family into the bargain," which is sometimes awkward and miserable enough, when they are a bad set. But now about the drawings.

I have again made a few with printer's ink, and this week I made some experiments to mix that printer's ink with white, and found out that it can be mixed in two ways—that is, with the white from the tubes of oil paint, and probably better still, with the ordinary powdered white zinc, that can be obtained at any drug-store, it must be diluted with turpentine, which doesn't soak this paper, and give spots at the back like oil does, because it dries up quickly and disappears.

One gets much stronger effects working with the printer's ink than with the ordinary ink.

How beautiful the work of Jules Dupré is. In the show-window of Goupil's I saw a small marine which you certainly know. I went nearly every evening to look at it, but as to Dupré and such art, of which one sees so much more in Paris than here, you are perhaps somewhat blasé and you do not know what a beautiful impression it makes here, where one sees so very little of it.

I am reading the last part of "Les Misérables," the figure of Fantine, a prostitute, made a deep impression on me,—oh, I know just as well as everybody else, that in reality one will not find

exactly a Fantine, but this character of Hugo's is true, as indeed are all his characters, being the essence of what one sees in reality.

It is the type—of which one only meets individuals.

If you meet, one of these days, an engraver like, for instance, Girardet or Eichens, who make aquatints, you would do me a great favour if you just asked him how the drawings are usually made, which serve as guidance for the engraving. Perhaps they will answer then, with printer's ink; if they do this, with what do they dilute the printer's ink, how do they use it?

It seems to me that if you spoke to some engraver casually about it, and repeated to me what he said, I might find in it some thing that would throw light on some questions, even though it were no direct information about how the printer's ink is diluted, so that one can work with it *on paper* in different ways.

There certainly is some other kind of printer's ink than the one I use just now, and gradually I will find out many things for myself. When one works with printer's ink and turpentine as I do now, the drawings get effects like those in aquatint engravings. I have seen at a time, drawings, for instance, of Mottram, the English engraver, who has engraved Boughton's pictures, and I wish I knew with what materials he worked.

Of course I'm in no hurry for this information, only when you hear something about different techniques of drawing, be sure to tell it to me.

I quite well remember Sook's wife and her mother<sup>1</sup> (if she still lives with her), and used to visit at their house, and I think them two sympathetic persons who remind me of those of my own household, so much so that I often think of them as of people of the same family. They are just like figures from Souvestre, for instance, or of Ed. Frère. One sees them often in Paris, in fact one finds them everywhere. Such persons always remind me of the women figures from the Gospel, perhaps because their expression is something like, for instance, the figure in Delaroche's Vendredi Saint, or in Landelle: "Bien heureux ceux qui pleurent." I know quite well their conception is not complete, there are other aspects better still than Delaroche, and deeper than he, for instance, those of Lhermitte and Herkomer.

<sup>1</sup> Acquaintances of Vincent and Theo in Paris, with whom Theo's patient went to live.

Well, I see those also, but I can readily understand that in the days of Souvestre, Delaroche, Frère, Landelle, etc., this tendency became popular, though compared to Millet and others it isn't quite correct and true.

Is Anker still alive? I often think of his work; it is so serious and so fine in sentiment. He is a real good old one of the type Brion. Lad, how I sometimes long to have you in the studio once more. I heartily hope you will get back the money from H. As to me, I had to pay so much all at once that very little is left. Well, write as soon as you can, about the twentieth. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter and thanks for the enclosure.

I read your letter with great interest. I am glad that you are aware from what quarter the difficulties will probably arise, that—without doing it on purpose, women like, for instance, Mrs. Sook (however good they may be in other ways) are little careful as to what they say, etc. When you refer to the tie between your patient and her own mother, that's a thing about which I cannot wish you joy. However, it is nothing unusual.

But it is a sad thought indeed, that a thing like the relation between mother and daughter can have a dark side, so that a man who loves and seeks for *light* can be fatally thwarted by it.

The influence of a mother and conversation with friends sometimes brings, more than anything else, in women, a kind of backsliding, which prevents reform in thought and action—sometimes so urgently necessary.

In a certain preface by Zola, he says, I think, the following: “Ces femmes ne sont cependant pas mauvaises, l'impossibilité d'une vie droite dans les commérages et les médisances des faubourgs, est la cause de leurs fautes et de leurs chûtes.” Entering into relations with her family, I'm afraid would bring the drawback of falling into officialism (people sometimes very indiscreetly take it

so) where one only intended privacy and nothing official. To act silently is not everybody's intention, and some elder and wiser members of the family often become so clamorous that one regrets having spoken to them. The more so, because they cannot keep from intriguing and, well—they are probably wolves.

I wish we were not so far from each other. I wrote to you yesterday in detail about some difficulties which perhaps will soon present themselves to you, but the feeling that I myself do not know sometimes how to face them kept me back from sending the letter, besides I have full confidence that love, when true, cannot die, at least not where at the same time one acts with judgment. But I would like to scratch this out again, because it isn't correct, for love can certainly die—but there is a strength of revival in love.

*Ce que l'homme tue Dieu le ressuscite.*

Van der Weele came to see me again. Perhaps he will bring me in contact with Piet Van der Velden, whom I think you will know from his peasant and fisherman's figures.

I once met Van der Velden, and he then made a very good impression, he reminded me of the figure of Felix Holt, the radical, by Eliot. There is something broad and rough in him that appeals to me very much—something of the roughness of *torchon*. A man who apparently doesn't seek culture in outer things, but who is inwardly much, very much farther than most.

Well, he is a real artist, and I wish I knew him, for I have confidence in him, and I know for sure that I would learn from him. Even if it isn't through Van der Weele it's not impossible that I shall meet him some day.

Rappard would have come to see me last Monday, but then he wrote his sister had fallen ill, and he couldn't come. Perhaps he will come this week.

At present there is not a single drawing in which I do not work with brush and printer's ink.

To tell you the truth, my purse is rather empty, that certainly is not your fault, yet neither is it mine, no matter how I contrive I cannot save more, and for the execution of some plans I ought to have more money than I have to spend. If I began those things, I should have to give it up in the middle. But it is a melancholy thing to have to say, "I could make such and such a thing, if it

were not for the expenses.” An unsatisfied energy remains then, which one should wish to use instead of having to stifle it. But I do not want to complain—I am grateful that I can make progress—though not so vigorously as I should wish. But the English say “Time is money,” and I sometimes involuntarily think it hard to see the time pass by, in which things might have been done if I had had the means.

You will understand what I mean: I should wish to be able to spend more, both on models and on painting materials. Though I do not sell a single one of my studies, I think they are worth the money I spend on them. The studio has become so much better and convenient, but I have only steam enough for “half-speed” and should want to go “full-speed.”

I repeat, I do not say it to complain, neither to force you to greater sacrifices, you are really also burdened above your strength. But I say it for a better understanding, and to unburden my mind. For you will understand that I am often full of heavy care. Well, we must make the best of it, and the things we cannot move by force must be undermined by patience. This week, I drew a few reclining figures, sometime I will need figures of corpses or of sick people, men as well as women. Recently I passed the house of Israël—I have never been inside—the front door stood open, as the servant was scrubbing the hall. I saw things hanging in the hall and do you know what they were? The large Herkomer, “Last Muster Sunday at Chelsea,” and the photograph after that picture by Roll: “Grève de Charbonniers,” about which you remember perhaps I wrote you at the time.<sup>1</sup> I didn’t know that there existed a photograph of the “Last Muster.” I possess the large woodcut of the two principal figures, and the first rough sketch made long before the picture. Well, adieu, boy, my best wishes for your patient, success in your work.

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

On your birthday I want you to receive a little word from me too. May it be a happy year for you, and may you have success

<sup>1</sup> See letter 238.



in your work, and I do hope, especially, that you may have in this year some satisfaction for what you did for your patient ; may she recover and start a new life. Do you know it is almost a year since you were here? Yes—I long very much for your coming. It is the work of that whole year that I have to show you, about which we must speak in relation to the future.

Do you think it will be about the same time as last year that you will come? Well, as soon as anything is decided about your coming, let me know it.

Some time ago you told me many things about these Swedish painters, Heyerdahl—Edelfelt.

This week I found a reproduction of a picture by Edelfelt: “A Prayer-Meeting on the Beach.” There is something in it of Longfellow’s poems ; it is very beautiful. That is a sentiment of which I am very fond, and which I think does more good in the world than the Italians and Spaniards with their “*Marchands d’Armes au Caïre*,” of which I get so tired in the long run.

This week I have been working on the figure of a woman on the heath, who is picking peat.

And a kneeling figure of a man.

One must know the structure of the figures so thoroughly, in order to get the expression, at least I cannot see it differently.

Edelfelt is beautiful of expression, however his effect lies not only in the expression of the faces, but in the whole position of the figures.

Do you know who is perhaps the most clever of all these Swedes?

It is perhaps a certain Wilhelm Leibl,<sup>1</sup> an absolutely self-made man.

I have a reproduction of a picture with which he suddenly came out, I think it was at the exhibition at Vienna in ’82. It represents three women in a pew, one sitting figure of a young woman in a checkered dress (Tyrol), two kneeling old women in black, with kerchiefs round their heads. Its sentiment is beautiful and drawn like Memling or Quintyn Matsys. That picture seems to have made a great sensation among the artists at the time, since then I do not know what became of Leibl. I found him very much like Thys Maris. In England there was also a German of that

<sup>1</sup> A mistake of the author ; Wilhelm Leibl was a German.

kind, but less clever. Paul de Gassow, who reminds me a little of Oberländer, whose heads you certainly remember. Well, there still seem to be some good artists in Sweden. I am longing again for your letter.

As to what I wrote you about relations between women and their mothers, I can assure you, in my case, nine-tenths of the difficulties which I had with the woman originated directly or indirectly therein.

And yet those mothers are not exactly bad, though they act absolutely wrongly.

But they do not know what they are doing.

Women of about the age of fifty are often distrustful, and perhaps it is that very distrust and cunning that entangles them. If you care to hear them, I can tell you some particulars some day. I do not know whether all women become more serious in getting older, and then want to govern and correct their daughters, and do it exactly in the wrong way.

But in some cases their system may have some *raison d'être*: but they ought not to fix as a principle and accept *à priori* that all men are deceivers and fools, for which reason, women must cheat them and suppose they know everything better. If, unluckily, the mother-system is applied to a man who is honest and of good faith, he is indeed badly off.

Well, the time has not yet come that *reason*, not only in the meaning of *raison*, but also of *la conscience*, is respected by everyone; to contribute towards bringing about that time is a duty, and in judging characters, one of the first things that humanity demands is to take into consideration the circumstances of the present society.

How beautiful Zola is—it is especially *L'Assommoir* which I often think about. A propos, how far did you get in reading Balzac? I have quite finished *Les Misérables*. I know very well that Victor Hugo analyses in a different way than do Balzac and Zola, but he goes to the bottom of things just as well.

Do you know what I should prefer in the matter of relations between the woman and her mother—in my case where it has decidedly bad consequences—that the mother came to live with us entirely.

I proposed it this winter, when the mother was very hard up, and

I said: If you are so much attached to each other, then come and live together, but I believe they, though worse off themselves, don't think good enough our simple way of living, which I desire both on principle and to which I am forced by circumstances.

Many people care more for the exterior than for the inward life of a family, thinking they act well in doing so. Society is full of that: people who strive to make a show instead of leading a true existence. I repeat: those people are not bad, but they are foolish. A wife's mother is, in some cases, the representative of a meddling, slanderous, aggravating family, and as such decidedly injurious and hostile, though she may not be so bad herself.

In my case, she would be much better off in my house than in the houses of other members of the family, where she is very often the victim of brutal duplicity and is incited to intrigues.

Towards your patient you have been absolutely honest and of good faith: that is the principal thing, which keeps the future clear, however it may be: but even if one has acted rightly, difficulties may sometimes arise. Well, in the year that begins for you to-day, I wish you very few of those—on the contrary may all good be your share. Well, write soon if you have not written already, which I hope will be the case. Adieu, boy, with a hearty handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were as welcome as ever. And as ever many thanks. And as I know how many cares you have yourself, I appreciated it the more.

And so the Salon has opened. I suppose you will have a visit from Mr. Tersteeg and C. M. one of these days. It is now almost a year ago since I had differences with him, that is to say, with Tersteeg. I will not cross his path again; he must have noticed that, I think; and he may be sure that I hardly ever think of what has happened.

If Tersteeg begins to speak to you about me, you might cut it

by saying: has Vincent ever troubled you or crossed your path since then? As he has not done so, don't you worry him either. It is rather unpleasant for me, that because of that quarrel with Tersteeg, I must always avoid the Goupil gallery out of discretion. You remember what Tersteeg wrote to father about me at the time—that opinion as if I had made it impossible for him to have anything to do with me, he has not taken it back up to now. Of course, as long as he has that opinion about me I will not enter his place again.

Not because I am afraid of meeting Tersteeg, not because I want to hide myself from him or anything like that, but because I do not want to give offence. If somebody wants to cut me, I myself will lend him a helping hand, and try to avoid the rare occasions of meeting each other involuntarily. For the rest not contradicting his opinion. Considered from a certain point of view, Tersteeg is not wrong—but things may be looked at from another side—they might be considered in a different way than he did—but that is his own business.

For my part, I have expressed my opinion about him to you—but, as far as I know, to nobody else—influenced by various very disagreeable circumstances, differences with Mauve, etc. I readily agree that through all these things my judgment of him was not correct either, and on condition that Tersteeg takes back what he wrote about me to father, that I had made it impossible for him that he should have anything to do with me in the future, I retract my opinion, that Tersteeg was the cause of disagreeable things which happened to me.

If I express myself clearly enough, you will perhaps find in this acknowledgment something that may lead to more peace or to a better understanding, to which I would be far from indifferent.

When I reckon from May of last year, Theo, the year has not been exactly easy, or free from care for me, has it? But that does not matter. To be without care or trouble has indeed never been my ideal or intention.—But things have not been exactly easy for me.

What you send me is not little but much, but though it was much more perhaps than you could really spare yourself; yet to go on and to make progress with my work, and to keep the household going, it is no child's play for the woman and for me, I assure you.

Now it is very hard on me sometimes that through such strained relations I must avoid the very persons with whom, for my work, I ought to be directly or indirectly in touch. And I wish it were peacefully settled.

Well,—for the moment I cannot change it.

I have several things on hand just now which I must carry through: but really I am very hard up. You write about Rappard—I am so sorry that he did not come when he wrote he would. If I asked him to advance me something I am sure he would not refuse.

For he himself proposed it this winter, but then he fell ill and we could not correspond about the matter, for which the money was intended—that is—lithographs, and drawings connected with it. I remember his father wrote: “My son is ill but I know about it; if you are perhaps in difficulties, I will advance you the money.”

I thought that so delicate of Rappard’s father, that it would have been indelicate of me to accept it at that moment. So I wrote to him: “Thank you, let us wait for the recovery of your son.”

Rappard recovered, but I heard nothing more about it, and he became absorbed in other work. So that is still hanging, and again and again there are obstacles in the way to carry that thing through. But I, for my part, did go on with it, namely making drawings in printer’s ink, lithographic chalk, etc., and I have had pretty many expenses too. Of course he is not in the least responsible for that: but what I want to say is it is a reason the more, I think, that he will not refuse to advance me something.

Therefore I will ask him to do so, but I am expecting a letter from him: and before I have described the whole thing and have got an answer, perhaps some time will elapse, for he is lazy in his correspondence sometimes. When your money arrived this morning, I had been without money—absolutely without a penny, for about a week. Besides, all my drawing material was exhausted. I was negotiating with Smulders about a lot of drawing-paper and took it, though the expense did not suit me at all now; but I wanted it absolutely, together with other materials, for instance, the printer’s ink of the engravers, and lithographic chalk. And I had to pay for several things for the household and to lay up provisions. And had to pay models, which I had had meanwhile, in order to be able to work on. I am very, very sorry I have to ask for it, but if



it is just possible, send me another ten francs. A week's work depends on it: for I cannot expect an answer from Rappard right away. I am already hard up, and have made arrangements with models. If Rappard then sends me the money, there will again come a time that things will run smoothly. If you can send it, this week will pass by without a hitch; if not, there will be unpleasant damage done. But do not be angry with me; it was a combination of expenses, all strictly necessary, which I could not avoid. And if you cannot send it—well, it will not kill us anyhow. The difficulties in small matters, about small sums also, often are really brain-racking and this is such a case. I hope Rappard will be able to help me a little, for I need it as much as a meadow needs the rain after a long drought.

Well, once more my best wishes for your patient, the weather is delightful here at times, in your country it will be beautiful too, and will do her good. Adieu,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I suppose you will be busy for the Salon—on purpose I saved up a stamp to be able to write to you once more.

I have written to friend Rappard, but of course no answer as yet; in ordinary cases he sometimes waits a month before he answers.

If you are strained yourself, send me less than usual, if it must be; but send it as soon as possible. For next week I have an arrangement with Van der Weele to go and *paint* in the dunes, he will show me a few things which I do not know as yet.

I have been working in the dunes for some days, but I long for a model: otherwise I cannot go on.

In short, I feel rather worried. So write as soon as possible, as for the work, I am getting on pretty well, and I think you would like some of the drawings I have on hand now.

I wish you might have some good luck, boy, for I know you are

having a hard time too. Best wishes, adieu, I must set to work—  
out of doors.

Yours,

Vincent.

I will soon write you more at length about some things. There seems to be something the matter with the woman, in regard to what I told you about her mother; perhaps it is nothing. I do not know it myself, but that worries me too. Write soon, boy, for it is very disagreeable to be without a cent. It makes trifles take the biggest proportions.

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Dear Theo,

I received in good order your letter with enclosed fifty francs. It was a deliverance, at least a relief, to me. I have also some news from Rappard but nothing definite.

A letter in answer to mine, that he will help me and come to see me, but he writes: "I don't feel well again," finishes with: "I enclose the money."

P.S.—"I think I will come at once and bring the money. I come to-morrow."

Next day a wire: "Cannot come. Letter follows."

So, though I have heard, I am not more advanced than in the Game of the Goose, where, as you remember, when one alights on a goose, one goes on, but when one chances to fall on another goose that turns its bill the wrong way, one has to go back to one's former position.

But it is not his fault, for he has been really very ill, and is still suffering from the consequences. Besides, his sister has had the same illness as he, and they have been very anxious about her, but she also has recovered. But I believe that our friend Rappard spends his strength on things that cost him much energy and nervous power and which are not worth the time he spends on them; so I heard, that before his illness, he made decorations for the centenary of a Utrecht painter's corporation, and now he speaks of church ornaments. Of both things I happened to write him my

disapproval, and both times it happened that he fell ill after this work; if he was laid up from overwork on his own things, it would be all right, but this, I repeat, it is not worth powder and shot, and I wrote him again: "You are a sharp-shooter and one of the few in the present time who carry cartridges in their bag. Do not use them save in cases where a shot is unavoidable.

I am afraid, dear brother, that the money you advanced our dear cousin H, for the moment has been turned into the shape of a malignant setter, or some such purchase of which he is very fond. I believe afterwards it is sometimes impossible for him to change them again into bank-notes or silver coins, because he, like many another horse or dog trainer, is caught in the meshes of some jobber. I am among those who wish him the greatest possible success in his negotiations, and can wish no better result than that he may soon pay you back what he owes you. There used to be, at one time, great plans of peopling the plantation with innumerable dogs. This kind of breeding may be very laudable, but for the moment, I will not say more about it than that I hope it may be extraordinarily successful. Has your patient quite left the hospital already?

But perhaps there will follow some days of care, no less serious than when she was still there. Michelet rightly says: "Une femme est une malade." They vary, Theo, they vary like the weather. Now he who has eyes to see it, finds something beautiful and good in *every* kind of weather, he finds the snow beautiful and the burning sun, finds the storm beautiful and the calm, like the cold and the heat, loves every season and cannot spare one day from the year, and is in his heart contented and resigned that things are as they are; but even if one considers the weather and the changing seasons in this way, and in this way the changing feminine nature, believing at heart that there is a reason in its enigma too, submitting to what one cannot understand: I repeat, even if one could consider it so, still our own character and opinion are not always, and at every moment, in harmony and sympathy with that of the woman to whom we are united; and one feels individually either care, either dissatisfaction, or doubt, notwithstanding the courage, the faith and serenity one may have.

As the professor who confined her, told me, it will take years before the woman has completely recovered her health. That is to

say, the nervous system remains very sensitive, and she possesses, in a high degree, the variableness of women.

The great danger is—as you will understand—her falling back in former errors. This danger, though of moral nature, is connected with the physical constitution. And what I should like to call oscillations between improvement and falling back to former bad habits, they worry me continually and seriously. Her temper is at times so, that it is almost unbearable even for me, violent, mischievous, bad. I can tell you I am sometimes in despair. She comes round again and she has often told me afterwards: *I do not know then myself what I am doing*. Do you remember you wrote me last year, you were afraid the mother would become a charge upon me? Sometimes I wish it had been so. The mother is so energetic, if she likes, and might have done so much better than she did. Now she often is more a trouble than a help. Well, when the woman does wrong, it is sometimes the fault of the mother, and when the mother does wrong, it is sometimes the family that is at the back of it. They are things which in themselves are not so very bad, but they prevent progress and destroy or neutralize all better influences.

The woman has decided faults and errors in her character—how could it be otherwise—but *for all that, she is not bad*, in my opinion. But those errors must be corrected—habits of negligence, indifference, lack of activity and ability, oh, a lot of things. But they all have one root; bad education, years of quite wrong views on life, fatal influence of bad company. I tell you this in confidence, you know, and not from discouragement, but that you may understand that for me it is not a life of moonshine and rose scent, but something prosaic like a Monday morning.

A small picture by Tissot, represented a little woman's figure in the snow among faded flower stems: "*Voie des Fleurs, Voie des Pleurs*."

Well, my woman walks no longer on a pathway of flowers, as when she was younger, and went her own way, and followed her instincts: but life has become more thorny for her, has become a pathway of tears, especially last year, but this year has also thorns, and the next years will have them too,—but with perseverance she will get over it.

But sometimes there is a crisis—especially when I venture to attack some fault of hers, on which I have had my eye for some

time. So for instance, to give you an example, the mending of the clothes and making herself clothes for the children. But the end is, that she takes it up one day, and in this respect, as in many others, she has already much improved. I have still to change so many things in myself too; she must find in me an example of diligence and of patience, and that is deuced difficult, brother, to act so that one can indirectly be an example to somebody else, and I too fail sometimes, I must raise myself to a higher pitch in order to wake in her new impulses.

The little boy, however, does very well; the girl has formerly been very ill and neglected.

But the little chap is a miracle of vitality, seems to oppose himself already now against all social institutions and conventions. As far as I know, all babies are brought up on a kind of bread porridge. But this he has refused most energetically; though he has no teeth as yet, he bites resolutely at a piece of bread, and swallows all kinds of eatables with much laughing and cooing and all kinds of noises: but for porridge he absolutely keeps his mouth shut. He often sits with me in the studio on the floor in a corner, on a few sacks; he crows at the drawings and is always quiet in the studio, because he looks at the things on the wall. O, he is such a dear little fellow!

The number of studies steadily increases; when you come, I think you will find among them enough to fill a map for your room perhaps: but you must see that for yourself, if you only understand that those you like you must of course consider your own property. But from the studies, new things must come forth; and better studies must issue from the old ones.

I am not sure of them myself, but I long for you to see them. With great interest I saw an edition: *Le Salon* 1883: a first series of illustrations, remarkably well done some of them. Reproduced in that new way. I subscribed to it, notwithstanding all my other expenses, but with a view on what I am making myself just now with the printer's ink and lithographic chalk. Listen, I firmly believe that some of my things would do well reproduced in this way, especially those in which the deeper blacks are expressed by lithographic chalk and printer's ink; the brownish wash, which I often notice in those illustrations, I can get as well. Well, when you come we can talk it over.



And perhaps I will write down in detail the different things about which I want information, and then you might take some of my studies, together with that letter, to show, for instance, to Buhot, who probably could explain many things to me.

I have read just now, *Un Mâle*, by Camille Lemonnier—very well done, in the manner of Zola. Everything observed from nature, and everything analysed.

In the show-window at Goupil's I saw a large Fromentin, a *Battle of Fellah's*. I saw also the *nouveautés* perhaps not all of them. Of Julien Dupré, about whom I wrote to you, I saw two things, which I liked less, and found more conventional than what I saw of him in a magazine this winter.

Have you heard, already, Rappard's picture has now been accepted in Amsterdam? It is already late. Thanks for your timely help.

I hope Rappard's "letter follows" will not last too long, and that H. may have some success with his dog breeding.

Adieu. Best wishes for everything.

Yours,

Vincent.

After all Fromentin is clever and is a *searcher*, and somebody who has perseverance, and he is conscientious too.

285

Dear Theo,

I must just tell you that Rappard has been here, and that I borrowed 25 guilders from him, promising to pay them back in the autumn. I was very glad to see him—he came in the morning and stayed till the last train in the evening, and we spent the whole day looking at the studies and drawings, and he also made a sketch in printer's ink and turpentine, just to see what it was like. Now I go to-morrow to him, to see his work and his studio. It was a real pleasant day; he was rather changed both in appearance and in manners. I for my part, like him now much better than before.

He has become broader in his shoulders and I think broader in his views, on many things, too.

Well, the money he advanced me has helped me to many things which I absolutely wanted.

Among other things, I ordered large sketching blocks for working out of doors. And I had to buy a pair of trousers, and tomorrow I have to pay the fare to Utrecht. But it has helped me a great deal.

I was also surprised by a very short visit from father. I think he rather liked the workmen's figures I have on hand.

Among the blocks I ordered with Rappard's money is also one for water-colours; I tried it at once, a cottage in the dunes with a wheelbarrow, etc., in the foreground, and a small figure of a digger in the background. O, Theo, someday or other I will surely get the knack of making water-colours.

These last days, or rather, weeks, I have had the very pleasant company of a young land surveyor who tried his hand at drawing. He once showed me drawings, which I thought very bad, and I told him why I thought them so bad.

Of course after that I expected never to hear from him again; but one day he came to me again, he had more leisure now, might he come with me to work out doors? Well, Theo, the fellow has caught the drawing of landscape so well, that at present he brings home really charming sketches of meadow, wood and dune. But he has still to pass an examination in October, and his father does not want him to spend so much time on drawing. But in my opinion, he can very well combine his profession of land surveyor with drawing.

He is the kind of fellow Rappard was when we first knew him.

The things he made before I knew him were horrible daubs, terrible things most of them. I began by telling him that at first he had to draw for some time. I made him draw many things which he did not like at all, but he trusted me in that. Now this morning he asked me if he could not try his hand at painting again, and *now* it came off very well, and he has scraped off all his old things. I am longing for a letter from you; Rappard sends you his best regards.

Are you well, and how is your patient doing? Father told me you had written something about coming this summer. I can hardly tell you how much I long for it. In the illustrated catalogue

of the Salon, I saw: "La Moisson" by Lhermitte. That looks well. How thoroughly does it express the action of the peasant figure. Well, adieu, I hope your letter will soon arrive, for I am through my money again. I saw Arnold in town with somebody else, perhaps Trip,<sup>1</sup> they walked with Mauve but I saw them quite far off. As Mauve walked in the middle, it reminded me of "Le Christ Entre Deux Larrons," or the group as silhouette against a sunny wall, reminded me of somebody arrested by two policemen.

However, these are but imaginations, "things as they might be seen." Good luck, boy. A handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

286

Dear Theo,

I just came back from Utrecht, from my visit to Rappard, and am glad to find your letter. Many thanks for it as well as for the enclosure. I am glad you are having a good time just now—"Le Paradou" must have been fine indeed. Yes, I should not mind trying my hand at such a thing: and I do not doubt you two would be very good models.

However, I prefer to see diggers digging and prefer the outside of Paradise, there where one thinks more of the severer: "thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow."

But I think the one thing gains in beauty in opposition to the other. I see from your letter, that you feel rather worried about what I wrote to you concerning the woman. But it has redressed itself once again and I hope there will come a time when things will go much better still.

When you come, I shall be better able to tell you, than I can write, what it is that makes me anxious about her sometimes. I repeat, the thorough recovery in soul, as well as in body of the woman, is a work of years. You need not worry at once, as if something exceptional has happened when I write to you sometimes rather anxiously about it; it cannot be otherwise. But in no case mention it to others. In general, she is getting on very well, and

<sup>1</sup> Arnold and Trip were art dealers,

makes progress: but at times I do feel anxious, though I find nothing extraordinary in anything that happens to me. Well, we will talk it over again some time. In no case think ill of her, she has awfully good traits in her character, which with some chance are worth fostering. Now about my visit to Rappard. I am very glad to have been there: we will now see more of each other in the future. One picture of his, a spinning woman, and especially the large sketch for it, I found very serious and really sympathetic. Then fusains—one of a hall in a Blind Asylum, one of a kind of smithy, with important figures, very good.

A second picture representing Tile painters was in Amsterdam, but I saw the studies and the sketches for it.

My impression about certain changes for the better in his way of thinking was confirmed too.

I do hope our friendship will ripen from year to year, that we shall get more and more interested in each other's work.

He had a small water-colour of a village churchyard which I found exquisite of sentiment, very original.

If you know the Belgian painter Meunier—some things in Rappard's work reminded me of him.

Of course, during those mutual visits, we talked much about new projects and plans.

I firmly intend to start a few large fusains with figures, too.

But, Theo, the work brings so many expenses: and in many things, I have not the free hand that would be necessary. Of course, the household costs are heavy too. One needs food and clothes, there is also the rent of the studio, well, but it certainly has cheered me up, that Rappard likes several things I made, and now that I have seen how his own work is, I am more glad still that some of my things pleased him.

I am always afraid of not working enough, I think I can do so much better still, and that is what I aim after, sometimes with a kind of rage. And I see again in Rappard, how practical it is to use good stuff, to work often with the model, etc. Rappard's studio is very good, and looks very comfortable.

I wish you would bring my old studies with you when you come.

I think if you saw all the things together, you would make a different choice, and, when you are here, I hope we can choose the things you would like to have, so that they would form a whole.

I myself, cannot judge in how far some of my studies are finished enough to be worthy of being kept anywhere else but in my studio.

Well, but I came back from Rappard full of plans, and full of hope, because there I saw already the fruits of the studies, that is to say, combinations of different figures in more important compositions. *That is what I can expect* too. But it needs time, and meanwhile one must go on making new studies after the model. From them the good things can be set apart. The best of our arrangement is, that the studies are kept together, either by you or by me—let us keep courage and grind on. Early to-morrow morning, I go out with Van der Weele. Adieu, boy; again many thanks, and all good wishes for yourself,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

This week I have been working hard on a large drawing, of which I sent you a little sketch.

When I was with Rappard he said: "those very first drawings of yours were good after all; you ought to make some again in the same way."

Do you remember that quite in the beginning I sent you some sketches "Winter-tale," "Shadows Passing," etc.? *You* said at the time that the action of the figures was not well enough expressed, do you remember? That was quite true, but now, for a few years I have exclusively drudged on the figure, to get some action and structure in it. And through that very drudgery, I had somehow lost the animation to compose, and to let the imagination work.

When Rappard spoke with a certain warmth about that very first time, it awoke again. Now superficial though this little sketch may be, I think you will find back in it something of that very first sentiment, but now with more action. These are "Diggers of Peat" in the dunes—the original drawing is about one metre by half metre.

It is a splendid bit of nature from which one can draw an infinite number of subjects. I have been there very often of late,



and made all kinds of studies of it. Rappard saw them, but when he was here, we did not yet know how to arrange them together. Since then, I have found this composition. And when once I had found it, it came off pretty well, and at four o'clock in the morning I was already at work at it in my garret.

Once again having started the composing, I intend to go on with it, and to carry on some I have in my head and for which I made the studies already. I have made the preparations for it by ordering some stretchers and also a large wooden frame to be able to work in the frame and shut it off. I hope when this is finished you will not mind taking it with you some day to show to the men of the illustrations, and that such a thing will please more than those single studies.

But I cannot tell beforehand, and we can see how it is when you come. But, lad, I am so glad that I have been able to start this before you come. We can  *speak better*  about the future now.

I do want so much to make something comforting, something that makes one think.

You know that one of the pictures which I think the most beautiful of all that exist is "The Walk on the Ramparts" by Leys. That tendency, however, is not the fashion nowadays, but the sentiment in it has something eternal and one may have different conceptions of reality, of nature, and yet find again even now, what in the days of Leys was more generally sought after and felt than is now the case. But it demands continuous effort to express what one feels and to render the form.

I cannot tell you how that visit to Rappard has cheered me, I like his work so much, and when I was with him, he also said it had done him good to be with me. By talking together we have got new ideas.

I wish you could meet Rappard again, when you come to Holland. I think in his studio, as well as in mine, you would get an impression that reminds more of what one used to see in the studios, than of what one sees at present.

But I do think it will have your sympathy.

Rappard has just now on hand a kind of smithy, and last winter he painted "The Blind Asylum" and "The Tile Painters." All of them have style and are serious and original I think.

You understand all this brings me many expenses. Without

the money from Rappard I would not have been able to undertake this.

And though I have studies for it, still I continually need models, and the progress depends on whether I have money to pay them.

I have a few more in mind, but I am getting short of money again.

You see, whenever I have a bit of luck, I make use of it at once, to undertake a thing that otherwise would have become a miscarriage.

So, whenever you can spare it, do send me some extra if possible.

This, namely "The Diggers of Peat," is quite a different thing from "Le Paradou," I can assure you I feel also for "Le Paradou." Who knows, some day I may attack such a Paradou subject.

Write soon, if you have not written already.

When you see the drawing, I don't think you will find it too large. The proportion of the figures is such that one can put some strength in them, and each of them demands a special study. I have studies for all the figures that appear on it. I made this drawing with charcoal and chalk and printer's ink.

Well, good luck and write soon. A few days ago I was with Van der Weele in the dunes. We found there a spot where they were digging sand from the dunes, a splendid thing with diggers and wheelbarrows.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

288<sup>1</sup>

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and thanks for the enclosure. To-day is Sunday and I have been in a rage of work last week, and now to-day I sit down quietly to write to you somewhat more extensively than I have been able to do of late, because there were so many things to distract me. And I want to write to you, the more especially, as I see from your letter, that things are not going so well with you, and I want to write somewhat more cordially than usual.

.....  
.....  
I can tell you that my first composition, of which I sent you a

<sup>1</sup> Several lines are missing from this letter.

sketch, is almost finished. I first made the drawing in charcoal, then worked it over with brush and printer's ink. So there is some pith in it, and I think when you look at it for the second time, you will find more in it than you did at first.

Besides, since I sent you that sketch, I made a second drawing of a similar subject.

Do you remember that you gave me once (last year) a description of an accident in a stone quarry on the Butte Montmartre, where you saw a group of workmen, one of whom had badly hurt himself in the quarry? Well, this is a similar case, but simply the group of men at work.

I was with Van der Weele in Dekker's dune, and there we saw that sand digging, and since then, I have been there and had a model every day, and now the second drawing too is dashed off.

It represents men with wheelbarrows and men who dig.

I will try to make also a sketch of it, but it is a complicated composition and both can hardly be judged from a sketch.

The figures have been drawn after elaborate studies.

I should like very much to have these reproduced.

The first is on grey paper, the other on yellow.

I long very much, Theo, to have you in the studio again, for there are so many studies, and you can see now for what aim I made the studies, and many more things can be drawn from them.

I have had a frame made, or rather a *passe-partout* of common wood, and have given it the colour of walnut with a black beading, and that shuts off the drawing very well and it is pleasant working in the frame.

I have made arrangements for other larger compositions, and I have again stretchers for two new ones; I should also like to make wood-cutting in the wood, and the refuse tip with the ashmen, and the digging of potatoes in the dunes. It was a good thing that I went to see Rappard, for his sympathy has cheered me where I had not enough self-confidence. But when you see these drawings, Theo, and the studies, you will understand that I have had as much care and trouble this year as a man can bear. It is devilishly difficult to forge a figure. And indeed, it is the same as with the iron—one works on a model, and goes on working, at first with no result, but at last it mellows, and one finds the figure, like the iron becomes malleable when it is hot, and *then* one must go on working on it.

So for these two drawings, I had a model continually, and have worked on them early and late. I am sorry to hear from you that business is rather slack; if circumstances become more difficult, let us double our energy. I will be doubly intent on my drawings, but for the present, do be doubly intent in sending the money. It represents to me models, studio, bread; the cutting down of it would choke or drown me. I mean, I can do as little without it now, as I can do without air. These two drawings I had a long time in my heart, but I did not have the money to carry them out, and now, through Rappard's money they have got form. The creative power cannot be repressed, one must give vent to what one feels.

Do you know what I often think? I should like to get connection in England with the *Graphic* or *London News*. Now that I am getting on with it, I should like so much to continue a few large compositions fit for illustration.

Boughton together with Abbey are making for Harper in New York (agent for the *Graphic* too), drawings called "Picturesque Holland." I saw those illustrations at Rappard's (very finished, small though they are) and decidedly made after larger drawings. Now I say to myself: if the *Graphic* and Harper send their draughtsmen to Holland, they would perhaps not be unwilling to accept a draughtsman from Holland, if he can furnish some good work for not too much money.

I should prefer to be accepted on regular monthly wages rather than to sell a drawing now and then at a relatively high price. And I should like to make a contract for a series of compositions, in reference, for instance, to these two drawings I have on hand now, or those which I shall still make. I should think it advisable to go myself to London with studies and drawings and to visit the managers of different papers or, better still, the artists Herkomer, Green, Boughton (but some of them are in America at present) or others, if they are in London. And there, better than anywhere else, I would be able to get information about the different processes. Perhaps Rappard would come too, and take drawings with him also. Such a thing, more or less modified, ought to be done, I think.

I, for myself, would take upon me to give every month, one large drawing for a double-page engraving for illustration, and will also apply myself to the other sizes, whole page and half-page.

I know perfectly well that reproductions can be made large or small, but a double page is more fit for things done in a broad style, the smaller ones may be drawn in a different way, for instance, with pen and pencil.

Now, I don't think the managers of magazines find every day somebody who considers the making of illustrations his special aim.

From the little sketch which I made just now, after the large drawing, in a quarter of an hour, and which I enclose herewith, you see that I don't mind making the size larger or smaller if necessary; when I know that a certain size is wanted I can make it.

But for my own study, I prefer the large size, so that I can study hands, feet, head more in detail. Don't you think that in that same style in which I now made "Diggers of Peat," and "Sand Diggers," a number of things of wood-cutting, etc., might be made, which done in that way would be interesting enough to serve as illustrations?

But I repeat, the money from you is absolutely indispensable to me, as long as I have not found an employment. Of what I received from you to-day, I have to pay exactly as much as I received: I have *still to pay* three models who posed several times. I have to pay the carpenter, to pay the rent, to pay the baker and the grocer and also the shoemaker, and I have to lay in some provisions. Then I have before me two blank sheets for new compositions, and must set to work on them. I shall have to take again a model every day, and struggle hard till I have dashed it down. *Quand bien même* I start it, but you understand in a few days I shall be absolutely without a penny, and then those terrible eight long days of not being able to do anything but wait, wait for the 10th of the month.

O, lad, if we could only find somebody who would buy the drawings. For me, the work is an absolute necessity. I cannot put it off, I don't care for anything else but the work, that is to say: the pleasure in something else ceases at once and I become melancholy when I cannot go on with my work. I feel then like the weaver does, when he sees that his threads get tangled, and the pattern he had on the loom is to the deuce, and all his exertion and deliberation lost.

Try to arrange it so that we can go on with energy. I am going to ask permission to work in the old people's asylum. I have already made many studies of old men but I must have the women



too, and must draw the surroundings also on the spot. Well, you have also to provide for the woman, so you thoroughly understand, how in that respect, my life is not easy too, with two children into the bargain.

I think it is so urgent that you see the studies and the large drawings, especially with a view to the financial side. The same steps I would take in London with regard to illustrations, you might take in Paris, if you could show a few large drawings. But in that case, I think it would be best not to begin before we were almost sure of their being readily accepted.

These large compositions, they bring many expenses if one wants to treat them conscientiously. For, boy, it must all be done with the model; even if one uses studies, still one must retouch them again with the model. If I could take more models still, I would be able to make them much, much better. So, boy, if you think I could manage for once without your help, on the contrary. I assure you I need it more than ever, but I show you the chance of success we have, if we persevere. With Rappard's money, I have already bought several things, sketching blocks, etc., and everything you send is turned over into drawings, and I think you will like those I am making now better than the first ones. So let us keep up our courage and energy.

A great drawback for many things I should like to make from the beach, is that I have no Scheveningen woman's dress. You understand I could make such a composition with Scheveningen figures, like the enclosed little sketch. But when I draw a figure out of doors, it is of course too superficial. It must be taken up again and finished with a model and one needs the costumes.

That will be an expense, which, if I could make it, would enable me to start two or three drawings I have in mind. But how can I do it; I repeat, in three days all the money I have now will be gone, I have to pay off almost everything. For these two drawings I also needed different frocks, trousers, sou'wester, etc. A model does not always wear a good frock that is picturesque; by changing it, it becomes more typical and decorative. When you come, you must see how elaborate the studies are for the figures for the first plane of the sketch. I made them out of doors on a sand heap at a nursery. In the beginning of your letter, you write that

you are glad there was no reason for anxiety about the woman. Well, it is true there is no direct reason for it, in so far that also in this respect I try to keep serenity and good courage. But there are worries enough, heavy cares even, and difficulties are not wanting. I began trying to save the woman, notwithstanding the difficulties, and up to the present I have kept it up, but in the future too, everything will not be *couleur de rose*. Well, we must work as hard as we can.

Theo, do you know what were the difficulties I had with the woman, when I wrote to you last—*her* family tried to draw her away from me; except with the mother I have not meddled with any of them, because I did not trust them. The more I tried to analyse the history of that family, the more I was strengthened in that opinion. Now, just because I kept out of their way, they plot against me and made a treacherous attack. I told the woman my opinion about their intentions, and said she had to choose between her family and me, but that I did not want any intercourse with any of them, in the very first place, because I thought that relations with her family would lead her back to her former bad life. The proposition of the family was that she, with her mother, should keep house for a brother of hers, who divorced his wife, and is rather an infamous scoundrel. The reason why the family advised her to leave me was, that I earned too little, and I was not good to her, and did it only for the posing, but would certainly leave her in the lurch. *Nota bene*, she has hardly been able to pose all this year because of the baby. Well, you can judge for yourself in how far these suspicions about me have any foundation. But all these things were secretly talked over behind my back, and at last the woman told it to me. I said to her: “do just as you like, but I will never leave you, unless you turn back to your former life.” The worst is, Theo, that if we are hard up now and then, they try in that way to upset the woman, and that rascal of a brother, for instance, tries to drive her back to her former life. Well, I can only say about her, that I would think it sensible and loyal of her if she broke off all relations with her family. I myself dissuade her against going there, but if she wants to I let her go. And the hankering to show her baby, for instance, often brings her back to her family. And that influence is fatal, and makes the more impression upon her, because it comes from her family,

who upset her by saying: he will certainly leave you some day  
So they try to make her leave *me*.

Adieu, boy, let us work and keep our head clear, and try to  
act rightly! You know how it is with my money; if you can  
help me, do so.

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I must tell you that this evening Van der Weele has been to  
see my drawings. His opinion was favourable, and I am very  
glad of it. Do you know what I have done—in regard to the  
necessity to earn some money if possible? I have sent small  
sketches of both compositions to C.M.

I wish this may have the result that perhaps he will help, to  
carry out my plan of making a series of drawings of the work in  
the dunes. Then I thought that perhaps these drawings would  
be something for Cottier. I imagine they would look well placed  
in the panels of a large cabinet over a mantle-piece in a wainscot,  
in short, framed in woodwork as they do in England and elsewhere  
too. But you know how it is with Cottier, when there is a certain  
degree of style in a drawing he likes it well enough, but alas, he  
generally pays little.

Still, I believe he is one of those who would care for them,  
and besides, who could place the drawings well. Then, could  
you not show the sketches to our friend Wisselingh, and tell him  
I think they would look well framed in woodwork? At all  
events, urge him to visit my studio, if, perchance, he might come  
to the Hague. For, in case he might find them fit for the said  
aim, I could perhaps make an arrangement with him for more  
of them, and if I knew he cared for them, I could perhaps make  
them still better suited for that purpose by trying to give them a  
decidedly decorative character.

This morning, I was already out of doors at four o'clock. I  
intend to attack the chiffoniers, or rather the attack has begun  
already. This drawing requires studies of horses, and I made  
two of them to-day, in the stables of the Rhine station: and

probably I shall get an old horse at the refuse tip. That refuse tip is a splendid thing, but very complicated and difficult, and will cost me a lot of hard work. Very early in the morning, I made a few sketches, one that gives an outlook on a sparkling little spot of fresh green, will become the definite one I think: it is somewhat like the enclosed scratch; everything, even the women in the foreground, and the white horse in the background, must stand out against the little bit of green, with a streak of sky above it. So that one sees the opposition of all those gloomy sheds, sliding over each other in perspective, and all that dirt and those grey figures, against something pure and fresh.



In the tone of the chiaroscuro a group of women and a horse, form the lighter parts, and the ash men and the dung-heaps, the darker.

In the foreground, all kinds of broken and discarded objects, bits of old baskets, a rusty street lamp, broken pots, etc.

While making these first two drawings, so many ideas and such a desire for making new ones have arisen in me, that I do not know where to begin first, but I am decidedly going to stick to the ash pit now.

Well, Theo, we must keep good courage and try to work on energetically. We may be hard up sometimes, and not know how we will come through, that does not matter and cannot be avoided, he who perseveres often conquers.

And just now, when it is doubly difficult for you to send the money, there is perhaps really a chance to sell something: if you will only hear! I also thought if he did not stick to his idea of not wanting to have anything to do with me, Tersteeg might perhaps have a use for these compositions in smaller size, for instance, in sepia.

If you were only here, you might perhaps make some arrangement with him; I certainly do not refuse to take the trouble of making things, but as long as things are not right with Tersteeg and with C.M., and I do not have any resource whatever but the money from you, do try your best, for I think all depends on my working energetically just now.

Though I have hardly any money left, I have already made arrangement with the models for this new drawing, and with what is left for the moment, I will perhaps get to-day a Scheveningen bonnet and cape.

If I can get hold of that patched cape, lad, I have my woman's figure for the first plane of the drawing of the ash men, I am sure of it, and it is a beginning to make other women figures for Scheveningen drawings.

(Unfinished.)

290

Dear Theo,

While I think of it, I must tell you once more, that what you say about "like a meek dove" (a sentiment like Correggio painted) it is true that it does not last, and it is right that it does not last. It is also right that it is shown to us, and that we become aware of it and do not forget it, but it does not last, because that pathetic mood (though I believe deeply hidden in man it remains) is changed into more normal condition, so for instance, the woman here looks now much more like a mother hen fussing with her chickens. But a mother hen is a pretty animal anyhow. This morning, I was in an almshouse, boy, to see a little old woman (with whom I had to arrange about posing), and she had brought up thus far, two natural children of her daughter, who is a so-called kept woman. Several things struck me, in the first place, the



neglected appearance of the poor little creatures, though the grandmother does her best, and many are much worse off, then I was deeply touched by the devotion of that little grandmother, and it struck me that when an old woman puts her wrinkled hands to such a thing, we men may not keep back ours. I saw the real mother who just dropped in, in untidy torn clothes, with unkempt, undressed hair.

And, boy, I thought of the difference there is between the woman with whom I live as she is now, and as I found her a year ago, and between the children here and there. O, if only one keeps in mind the reality, then it is clear as daylight, that it is a good thing to take care of what otherwise would wither and be parched. And I myself think that no argument about the objections or the impropriety of meddling with it holds good against the reality of these things. And in my case, just because it fits in with my profession, many difficulties drop off, though from another side, the financial one, many difficulties indeed arise and will stay. But here also it sometimes happens that the poor may be the poor one's friend, and certainly it is a good thing that women and children learn to be economical and the man learns to work hard.

.....

And with regard to my finances, know it well that, whatever you can spare is to me absolutely necessary, as the air and my productivity depend on it, but I do think you need not be afraid of taking any steps towards recommending my work, for it will not be a failure, I think I can assure you we will find friends for it. And for my part, in order to lighten the burden for you, though otherwise I did not like it at all, I can assure you, I wrote to C.M. and I want to ask you: could *you* perhaps write a little word to Tersteeg that I have on hand those large drawings? Look here, boy, if *now* for instance Mauve gave a helping hand, perhaps, perhaps they might be made in pictures. I think the studies and compositions are elaborate enough to serve as foundation for a picture. If I had means, I would not care at all to sell these, and I would keep my work together till it formed one good whole.

And know that I long terribly for your coming. I think you will see, brother, that your faithful help and your sacrifices for me

have borne some fruit, and will bear more still. But I am greatly in need of money for the expenses. And even if we don't sell these, I think they might become the means of finding new connections, and perhaps redress the relations with C.M. or Tersteeg or Mauve.

Adieu, boy, a hearty handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

291

Dear Theo,

To-day I received a letter from home, and though father does not mention you in it, I want to speak to you about it, because just now you would perhaps like to know something more about their frame of mind, than what they write to you directly. And it is my impression, that for the present, you need not worry about it.

The said letter is father's first letter since his visit here, and it is very kind and cordial, and was accompanied by a parcel containing a woman's coat, a hat, a packet of cigars, a cake, some money. In the letter was a sketch for a sermon, of which I liked the text by far the best, and which touched me less than a simple word about a funeral from a peasant did afterwards.

I tell you this so extensively, that you may see there is nothing abnormal or no direct over-excitement, but I did get the impression that father was rather in a passive or submissive mood, more inclined towards a friendly, melancholy view of things than might be supposed from the words of objection you wrote to me.

I suppose those words were more intended as advice or warning—but not as a sign of direct opposition against the firm decision on your part. And I cannot help reminding you, that father is an old man, and so fondly attached to you, and I am sure you will find that he will give in to you if it must be so, even though it be in opposition to his own opinion, but that it would be impossible for him to live estranged from you or in less friendly relation. Well, I suppose I know father more or less, and I think I notice signs of a little melancholy.

If you want to remedy this, write somewhat cheerfully and lightly, and write about your visit of this summer as if it were sure that you would see them soon (even if you do not know yourself how you can arrange about the time of your coming).

For perhaps, perhaps father himself is conscious of having gone a little too far, or perhaps he is anxious how you will take it, and is afraid you will not come.

Of course I do not know it exactly and can only guess; but what I think is: Father is an old man and deserves to be cheered up if possible.

You must act as you think right, but don't be angry with father if he is mistaken.

That is what I wanted to say.

Now again about the work, to-day I asked permission to make sketches in the old people's asylum, that is, of the men's ward, of the women's ward and of the garden.

I was there to-day. From the window I sketched an old gardener near a twisted apple tree, and a carpenter's shop of the asylum where I took tea with two old almshouse men. In the men's ward I can come as a visitor: it was real typical, indescribably typical.

One little fellow, for instance, with a long thin neck in an invalid's chair, was capital. That carpenter's shop with a view in the cool green garden with those two old men, was just the thing, like Bingham's photograph of that little picture by Meissonier, those two parsons seated at the table drinking. Perhaps you know what I mean. But it is not quite sure that I shall get the permission, and the application must be made to the Guardian deacon. I have done so and must come back for the answer.

Meanwhile, I am making sketches for the drawing of the refuse tip. I wrote to you, I hoped to get a Scheveningen cape, well, I got it, and an old bonnet into the bargain; the latter is not very good, but the cape is superb and I set to work on it at once. I am just as delighted with it as I was with the sou'wester at the time.

And the sketch of the refuse tip is advanced so far that I have caught the sheepfold-like effect of indoors in contrast to the open air and the light under the gloomy sheds: and a group of women who empty their ashbins begins to develop and to take shape.

But, the moving to and fro of the wheelbarrows, and the ash men with the dung forks, that rummaging under the sheds, must still be expressed without losing the effect of light and brown of the whole: on the contrary it must be strengthened by it.

I suppose of your own accord you will take father's words in the same way, so that I do not tell you anything new, but I would be glad if, with a little goodwill, peace might be kept. Last winter, father was relatively as much opposed to my living with the woman as he is now in your case, yet he sent me a woman's warm coat. "I might have some use for it," not precisely indicating for what, but apparently with the thought "perhaps she suffers from the cold." Well, you see that is the right thing, and for *one* such deed I would bear with pleasure a whole shower of words.

For neither do I myself belong to those people who do not fail in words—such people would be perfect—and I have not the least pretension to perfection.

But what I wanted to point out to you is this: at all events father objects to my living with the woman certainly *much more* than in your case, and notwithstanding that, he thought this winter "confound the woman but she must not freeze." And perhaps in your case: "that poor Catholic girl must not be forsaken" or something like that, so don't worry, keep good courage and try to reassure them. Adieu, lad, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

292

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were very welcome, many thanks. And I was glad to see that you take things calmly, though I did not expect it differently.

Since I wrote you last I have been drudging very hard on that drawing of the refuse tip: it is a splendid thing.

The first drawing of it has undergone already so many corrections; it has been first white, then black on different spots, so that I copied it on a second paper, because the first was too much worn out. And I am working on it anew. I must get up early

in the morning for it, for then I get the effects I need. If I could only get it like I have it in my mind.

Well, the second one is of the same size as the two former ones of the peat digging and the sand digging, and it fits in the frame. For the moment it is looking rather well, but I am afraid I will spoil it again. But of that, one must not be afraid either, for then one never succeeds. And meanwhile I have still made a large study of a seamstress.

But the asylum has been a disappointment, in this respect, that they refused me the permission to draw there—they said there were no precedents of that kind, and besides they were having spring-cleaning and new floors were being laid in the wards. Well, never mind, there are more almshouses, but in this one I know a man who posed for me regularly, and that would have made it easy for me to make sketches. Last winter I saw the old almshouse in Voorburg. It is of course much smaller but almost more typical.

When I was there, it was about the falling of twilight, the old people were sitting on benches and chairs round an old stove, very typical.

Perhaps I will try that one at Voorburg, since I have no permission here. I was also a day at Scheveningen and saw a beautiful thing there of men with a cart full of nets that had been tanned and were spread out on the dunes. Some day I must certainly make a large drawing of that or of the *mending* of the nets.

It is an improvement, Theo, that I had those stretchers and that frame made for charcoal—and other drawings, for it is pleasant working with them. I think you are quite right in what you say about too much intercourse with painters being *no* good, but some intercourse decidedly *good*. And for that reason I am glad Van der Weele is coming.

Indeed, one can have a deep longing sometimes to talk things over with people who know about one's craft. Especially if one works and searches in the same spirit, it is possible to greatly strengthen and animate each other and one is not so easily discouraged. One cannot always live away from one's country, and one's country is not nature alone, but there must be also human hearts who search for and feel the same things. And only then the country is perfect and one feels at home.



This now is the composition of the refuse tip. I do not know in how far you can make it out. In the foreground, women who empty ash pans, behind them the sheds where the dung is kept, and the men at work with wheelbarrows, etc. The first one I made of it was a little different; there were two other men in the foreground with sou'westers which they often wear in bad weather, and the group of women was more in tone.

But that light effect is really there because the light falls from above between the sheds on the figures in the pathways. It would be a splendid thing to paint. I think you understand all about it.



I wish I could talk it over with Mauve. But perhaps better not, for it does not always help to get advice from somebody else, he may be ever so clever, and those who are most clever are not always clever too in explaining things clearly. I repeat I hardly know myself what is best. In the first place, painting is not my principal aim, and perhaps I will get ready sooner for illustrating all by myself, than if somebody who would not think of illustrations at all, should give me advice about it. With Rappard I get on best of all. Adieu, boy.

All best wishes and thank you for your timely help.

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Do you remember that I wrote some time ago: "I am sitting before two large blank sheets and do not know how I shall get something on them" ?

Since then, you know I made on one the refuse tip, but these last days I also made good progress with the second one, that must represent a coal-heap as I see it from the window of the studio on the grounds of the Rhine station. There are heaps of coal and men are working in them and people come with little wheelbarrows to buy a sack of coals, for which there is a great demand some days; and especially with the snow last winter it was a curious sight.

I have been thinking it over a long time, and a few days ago, it was so splendid one evening and I made my sketch so that I have had to make hardly any change since in the main lines of the composition. Then I had on the very spot a man as model, who climbed on those heaps of coal and stood in different spots so that I could see the proportion of the figure in different places.

But since then, I made several figure studies for it, though the figures will be but small.

Just while making these studies, the plan for a still larger drawing begins to take root, namely, that of digging potatoes, and I have it so in my mind that I think you will find something in it, perhaps.

I should want the landscape to be a level ground with a little row of dunes. The figures about a foot high, the composition in the breadth 1 by 2.

Right in front, in a corner, as a set-off, kneeling figures of women who gather the potatoes.

On the second plane, a row of diggers, men and women.

And I want to draw the perspective of the field so that at the corner of the drawing opposite to that where the potatoes are gathered, is the spot where the wheelbarrows come.

Well, except the kneeling women figures, I could show you all the other figures already in large studies.

Yes, I should like to start that drawing one of these days. I have the grounds pretty well in my mind and will choose at my

ease a fine potato field and make studies of it for the lines of the landscape.

Towards the autumn, when they dig the potatoes, the drawing ought to be finished, at least an elaborate sketch of it, and I should only have to put in the finishing touches.

Last year I saw it here, the year before last I saw it in Brabant, where it was splendid, and the year before that in the Borinage, where it was done by miners. So I have it full right in my mind.

The figures ought to be so that it would be true everywhere, rather than a study of costume.

Well, that blank sheet preoccupies me, among all my other work, and while making studies I am searching already for new ones.

The row of diggers must be a row of dark figures, only seen in the distance, but very elaborate and varied in movement and type. For instance, a simple young fellow beside one of those typical old Scheveningen men, in a white and brown patched suit with an old top-hat, such a dull black one which they put in the neck; for instance, a short sturdy woman's figure, soberly clad in black, beside a tall grass mower in white trousers, light blue frock and straw hat—a bald head next to a young woman. These thoughts rise in my mind by the contrast in the studies I have made already.

We must wait and see. But anyhow, I have bought a large stretcher (an old picture-frame) at Laarman's and fixed it. And every day it becomes more clear to me, but it is confoundedly difficult to find figures that do well in contrast with each other, and yet can be placed in a very narrow space. And one has to draw each of them three times or more before it fits well.

But I will make the sketch and do with it as I did with the refuse tip, that is, afterwards begin it anew, on another sheet, when the first does not turn out as I wish. But I wanted it almost finished, about the real time of potato digging, though I may have to work it out again on a new sheet.

It has been a good thing that I went to see Rappard, for there I really got the first idea of making those large drawings, and I have observed that, while composing, one feels more exactly what kind of studies one has to make. I am working with great animation these days, and relatively without getting tired, because I feel

so interested in it. I had long since restrained myself from composing, as you know, and in that respect, a revolution has taken place in me now because the time was ripe for it, and I breathe more freely now that I have loosened the reins which I had put on myself. But after all, I believe it has been a good thing, that I have drudged so long on the studies, for it is true in all things, especially for figures, that one must study seriously, and not suppose that one knows it already. I think it such a fine saying of Mauve, who says notwithstanding all his work and experience: sometimes I do not know the place of the *joints* in a cow. I, myself, at present often do in this way, when I draw a digger who puts one leg before the other, or one arm before the other, or bends his head down, then I still draw in detail the leg, the arm, or the neck and back of the head, that disappears behind the first one, and is out of sight in consequence, and only then I draw what comes in sight, to get it as correct as possible.

I hope I shall succeed in having the skeleton of the potato-drawing ready, about the time of your coming. I long very much to see you. Do you know anything more definite about your coming? Well, I must set to work on my coal men.

All my possessions in ready money consist for the moment in a coupon of fr. 1.23 torn in the middle, and that has been refused once already. So I need not tell you that I am on the look-out already for your letter. I have just fixed the large frame for distraction, and to be able to work those days before I get the money, when perhaps I shall not be able to take a model. But perhaps I shall after all.

My Scheveningen cape is a splendid possession; I made three elaborate studies with it: a woman with an ash pail, and two with wheelbarrows.

When you send money again, I hope that I shall get a fisher's jacket with standing collar and short sleeves, and a woman's bonnet. It seems the bonnets are expensive and difficult to get; well, at all events, I have one already. *Scheveningen drawings must be made also and shortly too.* Last year, about this time, I was in the hospital—the painted studies of last summer are bad and incorrect, I find—I think of it because I have just been looking up an old painted study of those coal-heaps, to see how the situation

was last year, I now think them made too slovenly, too much in a hurry.

Well, since then, I have concentrated anew on the drawing of the figure, and I think but very indirectly of painting. Adieu, write as soon as you can. Good luck! With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Soon after I had despatched my letter to you, I received a characteristic letter from Rappard, which I enclose for you to read, because you used to know him, but have not met him lately. From the serious tone of his letter in general, you will agree with me I think, that he has changed so much for the better (though he was all right before). His drawings are confoundingly well done indeed, and it is honest work that he makes.

Well, just read the letter. I think he has a solid opinion about things. Send me back the letter some time.

I have another thing to tell you—I told you about my plan for a large drawing—well I started it the very same day that I wrote to you, just because Rappard's letter had stimulated me; so I worked on it since then, and it has absorbed me so that I have been working at it almost the whole of last night. I saw it clearly before me, and wanted to carry it through. I made the composition simpler still, only one row of diggers.

I sketched seven figures in it, five men and two women, the rest are smaller on the second plane. It is the strongest drawing I have made as yet, and as to the conception, my ideas about it are like those which Rappard expresses in his letter. Like him, I approached the manner of some English artists, without thinking of imitating them, but probably because in nature I am attracted by the same kind of things, which are made by relatively few, so that if one wants to make them, one must seek a way to express what one feels, and venture a little outside the common rules, to render it exactly as one wants. Like Rappard, who in his drawing made all kinds of machines at work, that hardly anybody



else would think of attacking, and which are not at all *what one is used to call* picturesque.

Do you know how Rappard's drawing is? It is exactly like reading a description of a factory by Zola, Daudet or Lemonnier. I underlined a passage in his letter—that about *drawing in painting*. Well, it comes to about the same as what I said last year to some who told me: painting is drawing in colour, to which I answered: exactly, and drawing in black and white is, in fact, painting in black and white.

They said: "painting is drawing," I said: "drawing is painting," but I was too weak then in my technique, to be able to say it in anything but words; now I say it less in words but more silently in my work.

Since you wrote to me about your being rather in financial difficulties, I have really worked in a kind of rage, day and night.

This is now the fifth large one I have started, in fact it is the sixth, for the refuse tip I made twice. And what a lot of studies I had to make for them, you will see when you come.

Though Rappard has not drawn with printer's ink, I have done so here and there, but what he says is true—he works in a white *passe-partout* and then it looks more black. I work in a brown *passe-partout* with a black beading, the black of which has been made very deep, to keep the drawing brighter. When he says that the English do not use printer's ink, he is somewhat wrong, for they carry the drawings up, by using enormous depth of colour at the side of which the blackest charcoal becomes clear. This strength of colour is obtained by printer's ink or autographic ink, or lampblack, or neutral tint, and other blacks from the water-colours. You must not be surprised that I made so many in so short a time; in composing a drawing, almost more than in painting, thought and concentration play a part, and I for one, find good results by plodding on for a day and half a night, as I did on that last one: in that way, one can become productive too—it absorbs one enormously. But just then, when one feels so much attracted by the work, one must stick to it till one drops down, so to say. I am absolutely penniless; send the money somewhat sooner if possible.

I shall again sleep little to-night, because of the drawing; but

it is very cosy smoking a pipe in the night, when everything is quiet, and the break of day and the sunrise are wonderful. Well, boy, send the money soon if you can. Good luck. Adieu.

Yours,

Vincent.

295

Dear Theo,

It is not yet four o'clock. Last evening there was a thunderstorm and in the night it has rained. It has stopped raining now, but everything is wet and the sky is grey, but broken here and there by darker or lighter masses of clouds, neutral tint or yellowish white, that are moving through the sky. Because of the early hour, the leaves look greyish and in tone, along the wet road a farmer comes in a blue smock, on a brown horse that he has fetched from the meadow.

The city in the background is a grey silhouette, also in tone however, in which the wet red roofs stand out strongly. It looks more like a Daubigny than a Corot, through the variety of colour in the ground and the green, the brightness of everything.

I am sure you would enjoy it as much as I do, if you saw it. There is nothing more beautiful than nature early in the morning. Your letter came yesterday and was no little welcome. Many thanks. I was very hard up this time; I was absolutely penniless. The woman had no milk to nurse the baby those last days, and I too felt very faint. As a last effort I went in my desperation to Tersteeg. I thought I have nothing to lose by it, perhaps it is rather a way to bring about a better state of affairs; so I went there with a large sketch, about which I wrote to you in my last letter. I made of it a row of diggers, men and women, with a foreground of dumps of earth, and a glimpse of some roofs of a little village in the background. I said to Tersteeg that I understood perfectly well this sketch could not be anything for him, but that I came to show it him, because it was so long since he had seen anything of my work, and because I, for my part, wanted to give a proof that I did not feel any ill-will about what had

happened last year. Well, he said that he did not carry any ill-will either; as to the drawing, he had told me last year that I ought to make water-colours, and he did not want to speak about it again, in order not to repeat himself. Then I told him that I had tried a water-colour now and then and had several of them in my studio, but that I myself had more heart for another kind of drawing, and felt more and more passion for strongly drawn figures.

Then I told him that I felt guilty of having kept those drawing examples of Bargue's all the time, that I would have returned them long ago, if what had happened last year had not prevented me from speaking about it, but that I came also to settle that question.

A few of them had been damaged by use, though but little, and as there were a few other things on my account at that time, I hoped he would be inclined, either now or later, to take a few drawings from me to balance that account, and I hoped he would approve of my having come in order to settle that affair. Well, he agreed to this, and I am glad the Bargues are returned now, and I told him that there were in the studio a great many things he had not seen.

He said he was glad to see from the drawing that I was at least working, and I asked him if there was any reason for him to doubt that I was working. Well, then a telegram came for him, and I went away. At all events the question of the Bargues is off my mind, and I have thanked him once more for having lent them to me at the time, for they have been of great use to me. But after all, I do not even really know whether he liked the drawing or not.

I would not be in the least surprised if he considered it crazy work, or absolutely absurd, because he said he would rather not have anything to do with it. But even if he does find it absurd or crazy, I do not think I must let this upset me, or take that opinion of his as decisive or conclusive.

I still always think it possible, that the time will come when Tersteeg will have another opinion about me, also about my actions now and last year. But I will leave that to time, and if he persists in finding wrong in all I do, well, I will take it coolly and go my own way, as if he did not exist.

For the rest, I will let it go till, for instance, you come here,

and after all I am not sorry I went there. I was very glad to hear that things are going well with you. Have a good time, boy. I have also, relatively speaking, a good time, except many financial worries, many worries, but with my work I am in luck; I work with enormous pleasure lately, and with a firm feeling of "being on the right way," like Rappard says of himself in the letter which I sent you. Yes, lad, if one perseveres and works on without minding the rest, if one tries honestly and freely to fathom nature, and does not lose hold of what one has in mind, whatever people may say, then one feels calm and firm and faces the future quietly. Yes, one may make mistakes, one may perhaps exaggerate here or there, but the thing one makes will be original. You have read in Rappard's letter the expression: "I used to make things now in this, then in that style, without sufficient personality: but these last drawings have at least a character of their own, and I feel that I have found my way." I feel almost the same thing now.

Some time ago, I read a remarkable saying of Taine's (Essay on Dickens), he says: "*le fonds du caractère Anglais c'est l'absence du bonheur.*" I do not think that saying quite satisfactory and correct: it does not explain everything, but still it is deucedly to the point and contains great truth.

A typical English saying is that of Carlyle: "the result of an idea must not be a feeling but an *action*."

That conception of life, which leads a man to concentration, not in the very first place to seek his material happiness but above all things concentrate on his work, to do some good, is a thing of which one finds many examples in England, and which is perhaps a national trait of character. Carlyle also says: "Knowest thou that worship of sorrow, the temple thereof founded some eighteen hundred years ago, now lies in ruins, yet its sacred lamp is still burning." When I think of de Groux, for instance, or of what you told me now and then about Daumier, I find in them something of "This worship of sorrow."

The drawing which I showed Tersteeg, did very badly in his little room, one must see it in the surrounding of other drawings: then it makes quite a different effect. Well, yesterday I worked at it all day again to finish the figures better.

Since I wrote to you, I have made besides, four large studies for the digging of potatoes. Here in the neighbourhood they dig the

potatoes with a short-handled fork, and the digger is kneeling. I imagine a fine thing might be made of those kneeling figures in a flat country in the evening, something that would have a certain sentiment of devotion, therefore I studied it closely, and have already a man who sticks his fork in the ground (the first movement) another who pulls out the potato plant (the second movement) then a *woman's figure* in the same action and a third man's figure who throws the potatoes in a basket.

I will start this drawing to-day or to-morrow, but among the men's figures I want one with a bald head.

For the studies which I have finished already, I had a young peasant, a real type, with something broad and rough and *non ébarbé* about him.

Now about these drawings, Theo, I don't think I will sell them, but still I remember what Israël's said to Van der Weele about the latter's large picture: "You will certainly not sell it, but that must not discourage you, for it will give you new friends and make you sell other things."

Some day, when I can afford it, I will make on canvas such an elaborate sketch as I have now made on paper and try my hand at painting again. But I should have to take great pains with the models for it, otherwise it certainly would become a failure. I have a few things in mind that will do well painted in oil. From C.M. I had no answer to my letter, and so I will not soon write again.

So you see, Theo, there is very very little chance of my selling anything. It was no pleasant thing to go to Tersteeg, I assure you, but I did so, thinking: perhaps, perhaps he will be inclined to forgive and forget everything from both sides. But he is not so far yet, that was clear enough, and I believe it is still as you described so well at the time, "sometimes he is aggravated by the way I would shake hands with him," or one of those little antipathies which make one dislike a person, so one would rather avoid him.

I am rather hard up; last year, you remember, I had now and then an extra from you, and it is now already since February or March, I think, that you for certain reasons are rather straightened yourself. I do not know how to keep things going, and the expenses increase beyond my power, though I skimp in everything, and the woman too.

The money from Rappard helped me for a moment to buy the



materials for those large drawings, but the large drawings bring many expenses in regard to models. And there are the stretchers and the paper, etc., and besides I make a lot of small ones too.

So the days drag heavily on, and are hard to get through, for the woman and for me, because of the scantiness in everything. I told Tersteeg that I longed much to be on good terms again with Mauve, but he did not answer a word. The total impression of my visit to Tersteeg is that it would have been nicer of him, as such a long time had passed since then, if he had taken it somewhat lightly, but there was a ponderousness in the air, and something of: "there you are, bothering me again, do leave me alone." He did not use the same words, for he spoke very formally, but I think the meaning was quite obvious considering what *he might have said*, namely, "I agree to our making it up, and I will come and look at your work," or something like it.

But I may be wrong in this, and will let time pass over it again and see whether it redresses itself, and hope for the best. For the very reason that I hope some things will redress themselves and come right, I must continue to work hard.

The one thing I hope more than anything else is that when you come you will find I have made progress and find some good in my work. You wrote to me from time to time that you found something in it, and I don't think you were mistaken, or that Tersteeg is right with his absolute indifference which is almost hostile. Yes, that is the very first thing which I value, that you, who from the very beginning have done so much, yes, everything for my work, may continue to find some good in it. If I can bring this about, I would at your coming forget all the cares of the whole year. I fancy that among the many figures I have drawn there might be some of which Tersteeg might say if he saw them: "I should like to see this or that one in such a size in water-colour." In such a case I would not refuse to try it, not for my own pleasure, but to sell something if possible. But these are not the only things that seem possible to me, for in the future I will make quite different things still from what I have made till now. I know by experience how one can have a dislike for another's work, or be indifferent to it and keep that up a long time, till one day, unexpectedly, one sees a thing of his, thinks it over, and remembers his former work, and says to oneself: "wait a minute, that must be good after all," and

then one feels an interest, one keeps it in mind involuntarily—and has learned to like it.

I felt this, especially with English drawings, I did not like them at all at first, and thought just like most people here, that the English are in fact quite wrong, but that did not stay, and I have learned to look at things from a different angle.

Do you know what I long for sometimes? to make a trip to Brabant. I should love to draw the old churchyard at Nuenen, and the weavers.

To make, for instance, during a month, studies of Brabant, and to come back with a lot of them, for a large drawing of a peasant funeral for instance.

Before I finish, I repeat that when you write in your last letter that you are having a good time, I can say the same to you; in regard to the work I have a great serenity and good spirits and I have so much to do that it quite absorbs me. But the money is a confounded thing, I have more expenses than I can cover.

Do you know what I was thinking of lately? Of that book on Gavarni that you have. I remember from it how Gavarni's drawings of London drunkards and beggars, etc., according to his own saying, only turned out well after he had lived there for some time, I think after a year, and he writes in a letter how it takes time to feel at home in new surroundings.

Well, I begin to feel quite at home here now, compared to the beginning, and I find very superficial what I made here at first. And the very hope to express myself more and more strongly and more elaborately makes this time seem a good one to me, for there is no lack of subjects, and of models (if I can only pay them). I am full of ideas and plans, and so the cares do not overwhelm me as yet.

But things must be paid for, and everything costs money, and one has obstructions that are like cutting one's way through a hedge of thorns, and this is a fact, that I ought to take more models, but I cannot do so, I try my utmost, and, so to say, more than my utmost, to pay the expenses for it, but the household costs money too, and I cannot make both ends meet. *Qu'y faire?*

Do you remember, perhaps from your time at the Hague, persons to whom I could show my work? I myself do not, except one, and that is Lantsheer, but for him, it must be very very good,

and for this very reason that I hope to sell him something *later* I should not like to show him anything *now*. Lantsheer is an uncle or some such relation of Rappard's. Rappard wrote to me once, that he had shown him a little sketch of mine, and that L. had liked it.

If some day I should have something which I would think fit for him, I could come in contact with him through Rappard. I do not like to go and see people to show my work; if it were somebody else's work, I should not mind it, but now it is my own. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I am almost sure that when Rappard has seen the large drawings some day, he will speak to Lantsheer about me, even without my asking for it.

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Dear Theo,

It is true I have written to you often of late, but my letters harp so much on the same thing, that I am angry with myself for not writing you in a somewhat more amusing way. It will come back some day—I think when you have been in the studio again, there will be more animating subjects to write on. I hope so at least, and it will be so if you feel sympathy for what I am making and what you have not seen as yet.

I saw this week in *Paris Illustré*, a fine reproduction of a drawing by Ulysse Butin: "La Mise à l'Eau." Fishermen and women who push a boat in the sea. I saw it at the very time that I was thinking involuntarily of Butin and of Legros, while I was drudging on a thing which is quite another subject from what they make, viz. those kneeling potato diggers working with their short-handled forks, about which I wrote to you not long ago, that I made studies for. I have now a sketch of it on the easel, with four figures, three men and a woman. I want something broad and striking with silhouette and drawing in it. That is what I am seeking more and more.

I always remember the strong impression made upon me by the first picture I saw of Butin (one of his later ones). It was that one of which he himself made an etching afterwards. I think it is called "The Jetty," women on the look-out for boats, that are expected to run in on a stormy night. That was the first one I saw of his, and since then I have seen the one at the Luxembourg and several others.

I find him very honest and serious, and I believe that just when he apparently has drawn with a hasty hand, his drawing has remained *après tout*, not less reasonable and correct. He is one of the men I do not know personally, and yet when I see his work, I can imagine how he has made it. Don't you like Blommers' picture at the Salon "November"? I did not see the picture, but



only the reproduction. I think it looks exactly like a Butin and it has more passion (and something dramatic) than Blommers' usually have.

For the moment, I have on hand no less than seven or eight drawings of about a metre size, so you can imagine I am head over ears in my work.

But I hope so much to make my hand more dexterous through all this time of drudgery.

So, for instance, the dislike I had to work with charcoal disappears more every day. One reason for this is, that I have found a way to fix the charcoal and then work over it, for instance, with printer's ink.

Here follows a little sketch of potato diggers, but on the drawing they are sitting a little wider apart.

While I am writing to you I think of that evening—perhaps you remember it, though it is years ago—when you and I together spent an evening with Mauve, when he still lived near the barracks and he gave us a photograph of a drawing of his, a plough.

Little did I think at the time that I myself should become a draughtsman, neither could I think at the time that difficulties should ever arise between Mauve and me.

I always wonder that it has not redressed itself, the more so, because really, if one considers it thoroughly, there is hardly any difference in opinion between us. However, it is so long ago now, that I begin to get back my good spirits with regard to my work and the confidence that it will come right after all. I have had that before, notwithstanding all, but involuntarily, one gets upset and has a melancholy feeling, when such persons disapprove of it or say that you are on a wrong track. Will you write soon? Your letter will be welcome as ever. Can you believe that it is not at all easier to draw a figure of about a foot high, than to draw a small one? *On the contrary* it is much more difficult, and to get it in that size, yet in proportion, as strong as the little figures, is sometimes hard work, I assure you. Adieu, boy, have a good time and good luck in business. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were no little welcome, not less welcome was the tidings that you are going to write a little more at length. I hope you will write me in detail about “*Les Cent Chefs-d’Œuvre*,” it must be a good thing to have seen such a thing.

And when one thinks how, at that time, there were a few persons whose character, intention and genius were rather suspect in the public’s opinion, persons about whom the most absurd things were told, Millet, Corot, Daubigny, etc., who were considered—like



the constable views a stray rugged dog, or a tramp without a passport, and time passes over it, and voilà "les cent chefs-d'œuvre," and if a hundred are not enough, then innumerable ones. And what becomes of the constables? Very little remains of *them* except for curiosity's sake some warrants. Yet I think it is a tragedy, the history of great men—though it is true they did not only meet with constables in their lives—for usually they are no longer alive when their work is publicly acknowledged, and during their lives they are a long time under a kind of pressure, because of the opposition and difficulties to struggle through life. And so whenever I hear of such a public acknowledgment of the merits of such and such a one, I think the more vividly of the quiet somewhat sombre figures of those who personally have few friends, and then in their simplicity I find them *still* greater and more pathetic.

There is an etching by Legros : Carlyle in his study, which I often have in mind, when I want to think of Millet, for instance, as he really was. What Victor Hugo says about Eschylus: "on tua l'homme puis on dit: élevons pour Echyle une statue en bronze," something like that always comes in my mind, when I hear of an exhibition of somebody's works, I care very little for "la statue de bronze," not because I do not approve of the public appreciation, but because of the afterthought on the man; Eschylus was simply banished, but here too the banishment was a death sentence, as it often is.

Theo, when you come in the studio some day, I shall be able to show you a collection that you certainly will not find everywhere. I can show you something that might be called the chief work in wood-engraving of modern artists. The work of men whose names are unknown even to most connoisseurs.

Who knows Buckmann, who knows the two Greens, who knows Regamey's drawings? But very few.

Seen together, one wonders about that firmness of drawing, that personal character, that serious conception and that penetration and finish of the most common figures and subjects found in the street, on the market, in a hospital or an almshouse.

Last year I had already collected something, but what I found since has far surpassed my expectations.

When you come, you will not pay too short a visit to the studio, will you? Since I wrote to you, I worked on those potato diggers.

And I started a second one of the same subject, with a single figure of an old man.

Further, I have on hand a sower in a large field, with clumps of earth, which I think is better than the other sowers I tried before.

I have at least six more of them, as study for the figure alone, but now I have put him in a surrounding more especially as a real composition, and I have carefully studied earth and sky besides.

Then I have studies for the burning of weeds, and of a man with a sack of potatoes on his back, and one with a wheelbarrow. When I think of Tersteeg's opinion, that I must make water-colours and, supposing I myself am wrong, try with all goodwill to change my mind, yet I cannot understand how these figures of the man with the sack, of the sower, of the old potato digger, of the wheelbarrow, of the man who burns weeds, would retain their personal character, if I made them in water-colour.

The result would be very mediocre, of that kind of mediocrity in which I don't want to embark myself. Now there is at all events some character in it, something that—be it from afar—is in harmony with what, for instance, Lhermitte seeks. For him who more especially wants to express the boldness, the vigour, and the largeness of the figures, water-colour is not the most sympathetic means. It is different when one seeks exclusively tone or colour, then water-colour is an excellent thing. Now I must admit, that from those same figures, one could make different studies, made from another point of view (*viz.* tone and colour) and with another intention—but the question is, if my sentiment and personal feeling draw me in the very first place towards the character, the structure, the action of the figures, can one blame me when, following this emotion, I don't express myself in water-colour, but in a drawing with only black or brown?

But there are water-colours—where the outlines are very strongly expressed—for instance, those of Regamey, those of Pinwell, and Walker, and Herkomer, of which I think very often (those of the Belgian Meunier), but even if I tried this, Tersteeg would not be satisfied with them. He would always say: "it is not saleable and the saleableness must come in the first place now."

I for my part think he means in plainer terms: "you are a mediocrity and you are arrogant because you don't give in and make little mediocre things: you are making yourself ridiculous

with your so-called seeking, and you do not work." That is the real meaning of what Tersteeg said to me the year before last, and last year, and that is what he means still.

I am afraid Tersteeg will always remain for me "the everlasting no."

That is what not only I, but almost everyone who seeks his own way, has behind or beside him as an everlasting discourager. Sometimes one is depressed by it and feels miserable and almost stunned.

But I repeat, it is the everlasting no; in the example of men of character, on the contrary, one finds an everlasting *yes* and finds in them "*la foi du charbonnier*."

But with all that, life becomes gloomy sometimes, and the future dark, because the work costs money, so the harder one works the deeper one gets in debt, instead of the work helping one through, so that difficulties and expense may be surmounted by working harder.

I make progress with my figures, but in the finances I am losing ground, and cannot keep it up.

And of late, I sometimes think it would be well to move to the country, either to the seaside or somewhere where the field labour is typical, because I think it would help me to economise.

Here I could also do what I want, if I could earn a little more, and go here and there to make studies. And the advantage here is that my studio is good, and that one is not after all quite outside the world of art, and one can hardly do without some intercourse, without hearing and seeing something now and then.

I sometimes think of going to England. In London they publish a new magazine of importance, equal to the "London News" and "Graphic"—the "Pictorial News." Perhaps there I could find work and wages, but who can give any security? I only hope you will come soon, a year is a long time not to see each other, yet always thinking of each other. Now on the first of July our little chap was one year old, and he is the merriest, jolliest child you can imagine, and I think it is an important thing towards the saving of the woman herself, that this child is doing well, and keeps her busy and occupies her thoughts. For the rest, I sometimes think it would be well for her to live for a time in the country, far from the city and far from the family; it would help to bring a thorough improvement. It is true she has improved, but that influence of her family draws her

pack at times: I wanting to bring her to more simplicity, and they bushing her to intrigues and hypocrisy.

Well, she is indeed what one may call an "enfant du siècle," and her character has been so much influenced by circumstances that she will always bear the consequences in the form of a certain discouragement and indifference, and want of a firm faith in something or other. Often, often I have thought it would be well for her to live in the country. But moving brings also a lot of expenses. And then I should want to be married before I move if I went either to the country or to London.

I do miss here the necessary intercourse with other people, and I do not see any chance of improving this. After all, every place is alike to me, and I want to move as little as possible.

As soon as you have decided anything about your coming—do write to me. I am in doubt about several things of late, and it makes me rather nervous; and that will remain so, till we have seen each other, and spoken about the future. I have read lately articles by Boughton on Holland. They were written to illustrations by himself and Abbey, splendid things some of them.

One thing I have noted especially—a description of the isle of Marken—so, that I should want to go there, and who knows what a good thing it would prove to be, if one settled in some place where it is very picturesque.

But in such a case, one must have at least one point of contact with the world of art, for of course the fisherman population has not the slightest notion about it, and one must have enough to live.

Don't forget to write the promised letter about "Les Cent Chefs-d'Œuvre," and if you are very lucky in business, and could send me an extra, it would be very welcome.

As to living quite in the country—I love nature, yet there are many things that bind me to the city, especially the magazines, the possibility of reproduction. Not to see any engines would be no hardship to me, but never to see a printing press would be hard. Adieu, boy, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

I have been reading "Mes Haines" by Zola, there are good things in it, though I think he makes great mistakes, in his general

survey he does not even mention Millet. The following is quite true: "observez que ce qui plaît au *public* est toujours ce qu'il y a de plus banal, ce qu'on a coutume de voir chaque année, on est habitué à de telles fadeurs, à des mensonges si jolis, qu'on refuse de toute sa puissance les vérités fortes "

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Dear Theo,

If you feel like I do, you will now and then have a sudden longing to look up some fellow whom you have not seen for a long time. In this way I felt about de Bock, and I will tell you what I saw at his studio, because you used to know him even better than I.

The first thing I saw in the hall was a large sketch—an enormous windmill covered with snow, near a kind of ditch or canal. Half romantic, half realistic—a combination of styles which I don't dislike. But very unfinished—though energetically put down with a fine, strong effect in it. In short, a thing one would always look at with pleasure, and I don't mind that it is unfinished. I should like that thing of his just as it is, in my studio, because it makes such a strong effect.

Another sketch, that of his picture for the Salon, was also good, but more romantic still.

Then there were some delicately brushed pictures, several pretty studies. The impression he made upon me was about the same as last year, perhaps just a little bit more positive and serious. Some sketches were riper and more correct in tone and colour than last year, and the grounds firmer, but in my opinion, the relative proportions of the planes and masses, are always left too vague, which correctness in proportions is the typical quality of Corot and Rousseau and Dias, Daubigny, Dupré. They all have this in common, that they are very careful about it, and their backgrounds are also very expressive, and not so superficial.

But there are very good points in de Bock's work, and one would look at it with more pleasure if the things were put down in a less visionary way. He ought to be a little more realistic, then his work would be more masterly.



Neither can I understand why he does not vary a little more; for instance, I have also made this week a few landscape studies, one yesterday at de Bock's potato field in the dunes, the day before a spot under the chestnut trees, another of a ground with heaps of coal. Now, it is relatively very seldom that I happen to draw landscape, but now that I do so, I have at once three very different subjects. He who is decidedly a landscape painter, why does not he do that more, instead of painting always a dune with a little tree and a little beach grass. Very beautiful in itself, but there are so many things just as beautiful, and which one would suppose would attract him. Well, you know that as well as I. I repeat, my impression of him is that he certainly is not losing ground.

I wrote you in my last letter I had thought of moving, especially for the sake of being still nearer to the sea.

I spoke with de Bock about houses in Scheveningen, but I had better not complain about the rent of my studio being too high, when I compare it with the rents others pay, for instance, Blommers' old house is to let,—rent fr. 400—and I pay fr. 170—a year. Then the studio is not larger than mine, and as to comfort, I prefer to keep what I have now. De Bock himself pays as much as Blommers. And this accords with what I heard last year about average rents. If I wanted to live near the sea, Scheveningen would be out of the question, and I should have to go to some more remote place, like for instance Hook of Holland or Marken. But now I think I will ask de Bock to let me have a corner of his garret as a pied-à-terre, and to keep there my drawing material, so that I need not drag it along every time. If one comes there tired already, the work gets slack and the hand is not very firm (if one did not have to work directly, one would of course not count that little fatigue). If one has to walk and to carry everything, one gets just tired and warm enough to be handicapped by it. So that pied-à-terre at de Bock's and taking the car oftener, would perhaps enable me to make things of the sea and Scheveningen, more seriously than I have up to now.

De Bock promised to come and see me this week, and we will talk it over again. He himself thinks of moving, and he has rented this house till May and said something about its perhaps being empty during a few months. We must wait and see. He repeatedly asked after you, and I said you probably will come and see him this

summer. His large picture of the Salon has of course not been sold. How did you like it? Opinion about it was very divided. When I have that pied-à-terre of his I think I can manage to be often at Scheveningen this autumn. We shall see—but I long very much to work on the beach.

This week I made a study of a man who pulls a boat, and a man who carries peat, and meanwhile I am always working at the potato diggers. I hope I will get on with de Bock a little now, perhaps it would do neither of us any harm, and we might learn something of each other. He has bought a lot of antiques and his rooms look very nice, but it must have cost him a lot of money I imagine. Will you write soon? I wrote you about de Bock, like I recently did about Rappard, that you may know somewhat of what the friends are doing. Rappard is away: he wrote to me that after all he is using the printer's ink in the way I told him, and in this way, viz. with turpentine—he got on much better. You know that I always said of my present studio that it was good, especially after the change. Indeed, when I think of moving, I much rather would arrange it so that I need *not move*, for in comparison with others, I am very well off. Besides, one is attached to a house one has arranged oneself, and feels at home in it.

Try to send me something soon, lad, for I shall need it.

De Bock has also taken up Zola, and has read "Le Nabob" by Daudet too. Do you know "Germinie Lacerteux" by Jules and Edmond de Goncourt? That must be very good in the manner of Zola, I will try to get it.

I have ordered an instrument that will enable me to fix a charcoal drawing in the open air while working on it, then one can carry it up higher. I am longing to get it.

With de Bock, I found splendid potato fields in the dunes behind the lighthouse.

Adieu, boy, good luck and write soon. Good-bye lad. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I have been absorbed these days in a drawing by Regamey, representing a diamond mine; at first sight, not different from any of those superficial drawings that fill the magazines—one would just

pass it over, but if one looks at it a little longer, it becomes so beautiful and so curious that one is quite fascinated by it. Regamey is clever—this reproduction is by Felix who often reproduces the Japanese things.

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Dear Theo,

I had been on the look-out for your letter already and was glad when it came. Many thanks.

What you write about the exhibition is very interesting. How was that old picture by Dupré which you liked so much: I should love to hear more about it. Your description of Troyon and Rousseau, for instance, is striking enough for me to get an idea of the manner in which they are done. About the time of Troyon's "Pré Communal" there was in more pictures a certain sentiment, that I should like to call *Dramatic*, though there are no figures in them. Israëls expressed it exactly, speaking of a Jules Dupré (the large one of the Mesdag collection) "it is like a figure-painting." It is that dramatic touch that makes one find in it a *je ne sais quoi* that makes one feel what you say "it expresses that moment and that spot in nature, where one can go alone without company."

Ruysdael's Buisson has it also very strongly.

Don't you remember having seen old Jaque's where it was somewhat exaggerated, perhaps a little sensational—no, not that after all, which one admired for that very reason—though they were not counted among the best Jaque's by the public in general? Speaking about Rousseau, do you know the Rousseau of the Richard Wallace collection, "A Lisière de Bois" in autumn after the rain, with a glimpse of a wide stretch of swampy meadows—in which cows are grazing, the foreground quite in tone? For me it is one of the finest—it can be compared to that with the red sun of the Luxembourg. The dramatic effect in those pictures is a thing which, more than anything else in art, makes one understand "un coin de la nature vu à travers d'un tempérament," and "l'homme ajouté à la nature," and the same thing one finds for instance in portraits by Rembrandt. It is more than nature, it is a kind of revelation. And it seems to me, one must feel all respect for it, and not join those who often say that it is exaggerated or mere mannerism.

Oh, I must tell you, Theo, that de Bock has been to see me—it was rather a pleasant visit. Yesterday, Breitner appeared, whom I hadn't in the least expected because he seemed to have quite broken off the friendship. I was very glad, because in the very beginning of my stay here he was very pleasant to go out with.



I do not mean in the country, but in the city itself, to look for types and curious models.

There is not a single one in the Hague with whom I ever did this in the city. Most of the painters find the city ugly and pass by everything. And yet it is very beautiful in the city too sometimes, isn't it? Yesterday, for instance, I saw in the Noordeinde workmen busy pulling down that part opposite the palace, fellows all white with chalk, with wagons and horses. It was cool windy weather, the sky was grey, and the spot was very characteristic.

Last year I met Van der Welden one evening at de Bock's, when we were there to see de Bock's etchings. I told you then that he made a very favourable impression upon me, though he spoke very little, and was not very sociable that evening. But my impression of him was at once that he is a solid, serious painter.

He has a square Gothic head, with a keen, sharp, and yet gentle look, strongly built, in fact quite the opposite of Breitner and de Bock, there is something manly and powerful in him, even if he does not say or do anything in particular.

I hope to come in nearer contact with him some day—perhaps through Van der Weele.

Last Sunday, I was at Van der Weele's, who was working at a picture of cows at a creek, for which he has some serious studies. He is now going to the country for some time.

For a change, I have made this week a few water-colours out of doors, a little cornfield and a patch of potato ground, and I have also drawn a few landscapes as study for the surroundings of a few figure drawings which I am planning.

These are very hasty sketches of those figure drawings. The topmost is the burning of weeds, the other one the return from the potato field.

I seriously intend to paint a number of figure studies especially for the sake of carrying up the drawings. What delightful news that you intend to come to Holland in the beginning of August, for, as I told you often enough, I long very much for your coming.

Well, I talked it over again with de Bock, and I can leave my things at his house, when I go to make studies at Scheveningen. I also hope to go and see Blommers some day soon. I spoke to de Bock about his picture at the Salon, "November," the reproduction of which I liked so much in the catalogue.

He must still have a sketch of it, and I should like to see it. As to my going sooner or later for a shorter or longer time to London, I quite agree with you that there would be more chances of selling my work, and I also think that I could learn there a great deal if I came in contact with some artists there. And I can assure you I would have no lack of subjects there. What beautiful things one could make at those dockyards on the Thames! Well, we must talk all these things over when you are here. I hope you won't be in too great a hurry: there are so many things we must talk over.



I wish I could go once more to Brabant to make some studies in the autumn.

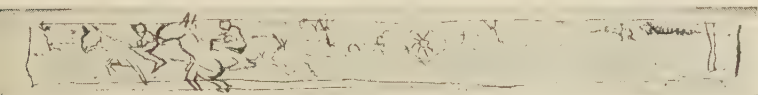
Above all, I should like to make studies of a Brabant plough, of a weaver, and of that village churchyard at Nuenen. But it will all cost money again.

Well, good-bye. Once more, thanks for your letter and the enclosure. Have a good time. Adieu, boy. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I add another few lines to tell you also some particulars about Breitner, as I have just come home from his temporary studio (you know he actually lives at Rotterdam at present). Do you know Vierge or Urabiette, the draughtsmen of the *Illustration*? Well, at times Breitner reminds me of Vierge, but very seldom. When his work is good, it looks like a hasty thing of Vierge, but when his, that is Breitner's work, is too hasty or unfinished, then it is hard to say what it looks like, for it does not look like anything—unless strips of old faded wall-paper from I don't know what period, but at all events a very strange one and probably very long ago. Just fancy I entered there the small attic he has rented at Siebenhaar's. It was furnished for the greater part with many match-boxes, (empty ones), some razors, and a box with a bed in it. Against the chimney I saw something standing, three endless long strips, which I first took for sun-blinds. But at nearer view they proved to be canvasses of the following size:



As you see from the above illustration, they are painted with some mystical scene, which one would suppose at first sight taken from the Apocalypse. But as I am told it represents manœuvres of the artillery in the dunes. Coolly judged, it was about 4 metres long to  $\frac{3}{4}$  metre broad.

The second one was the story of a man who stood leaning against a wall, in the extremest left corner of the picture, whilst at the right corner, diverse specimens of ghastly women stood staring at him,

while care had been taken to leave sufficient space between these two groups. And I was told that the man in the left corner represented a drunkard, which doubtlessly may have been the intention of the painter, but it might also have been something else.

The third one is a little better, and is a sketch of the market, he made last year, but which since then has been changed from a Dutch market into a Spanish one, at least as far as one can make it out. What kind of merchandise is sold on that market—in which country it may be—I for myself doubt that it is intended to be on this globe: it would rather seem to the naïve spectator that it must represent a scene on one of those planets visited by means of a projectile by Jules Verne's fancy travellers. It is impossible to define what kind of merchandise actually is sold there, but from afar it looks like enormous masses of comfits or candy. Try to imagine such a thing, but that it is absurd, and heavy besides, and you have the work of friend Breitner.

Seen at a distance, they are patches of faded colour on a bleached, dusty, and moulded wall-paper, and in this respect it has some qualities, which for me, however, are absolutely unsatisfactory.

I cannot understand how it is possible for a man to make such a thing. It is like things one sees in fever, or impossible and absurd like the most fantastical dream.

I simply think that Breitner has not quite recovered, and actually made these things while he was in fever.

Last year, when I had recovered, but remained feverish and could not sleep, I too had moments when I wanted to force myself to work, and made some, but, thank God, not so absurd large things which I could not understand afterwards to have made.

Therefore I believe Breitner will get all right again, but these things I find absurd.

Crumpled in a corner was a water-colour, a study of a few little birch trees in the dunes, that was much better.

But those large things, they were trash.

At Van der Weele's I saw another bad one, and a head that was very good, but the portrait of Van der Weele which he had started was bad again. At times I like the work of Hoffmann and Edgar Poe (*The Fantastic Tales, Raven*, etc.) but this work is impossible, because its fancy is dull and without meaning, and has no contact with reality. I think it very ugly. Van der Weele has two rather

curious little water-colours of his with a certain chic, a "je ne sais quoi," or what the English call "weird." Well, we must wait and see what comes of it. He is intelligent enough, but it is a love of eccentricity which he carries through. Well, this week I begin at Scheveningen. If you could have sent a little extra I might have bought some new painting material.

I am going to have a few drawings photographed in cabinet size or a little larger (to see how they will look in smaller size) by a photographer who has reproduced the drawings of Meulen, Duchatel and Zilcken. He charges 75 cents, that is not much, is it? I will begin with "The Sower" and "The Digger of Peat," the one with many small figures the other with a large one. If they turn out well, I could always send you photos of the drawings I have made, to show for instance to Buhot, to see if he could find a buyer for them. Of those that were accepted, they could get the drawings for reproduction, or I could copy them on their paper.

Once more, good-bye, Theo. Good luck. Write soon again. I have those photos taken, for we must stick to the point with Buhot. I must try to earn some money in order to be able to start new things, and to try my hand at painting too, for I am just in the mood for it.

After all, I don't think it nice of C.M. that he has never answered a syllable to my letter, in which I took the trouble of enclosing two sketches of the drawings in question.

Neither is it nice of Tersteeg that he did not come to see me, since from my side I tried to make it up. It is nonsense to say he is too busy, for that is not the reason; *once* in a year he might find time to come. Mauve has not only quarrelled with me, but he has also quarrelled with Zilcken for instance. Not long ago I saw Zilcken's etchings, and just now at the photographer's I saw photos from Zilcken's drawings. I leave myself out of the question, but I declare I don't understand what Mauve has against Zilcken: his drawings were good, not at all bad, but Mauve is capricious.

I add another half-page to talk a little about Brabant. Among the figures of types from the people I have made, there are several that have what many would call a decidedly old-fashioned character, also in sentiment, for instance a digger, who looks more like those one sees on the wooden bas-reliefs of the Gothic church pews than like a drawing of the present time. Very often I think

of the Brabant types, how very sympathetic they are to me. The thing which I should love immensely to make, which I feel I can make, provided certain circumstances of serious posing, is the figure of father on a path through the heath; the figure seriously drawn, with character, and I repeat a patch of brown heath through which a narrow white sand path leads, and a sky just delicately tinged, yet somewhat passionately brushed.

Then father and mother arm in arm—in an autumn landscape or against a hedge of beeches with withered leaves.

I should also like to draw father's figure, when I draw a peasant's funeral, which I certainly intend to do, though it would be very difficult. Leaving the difference of religious opinion out of the question, the figure of a poor country clergyman is, in type and character, for me one of the most sympathetic I know, and I would not be true to myself if I did not try it some day.

When you come, I should like to consult with you how to arrange such a trip to Brabant. When you see my drawings of almshouse men, you will understand my intentions and what I want.

What I want to make is a drawing that will not exactly be understood by everyone: the figure essentially simplified with determinate neglect of those details which do not belong to the real character, and are only accidental. For it must not be a portrait of father, but rather the type of a poor village clergyman who goes to visit the sick. In the same way, the couple arm in arm against the hedge of beeches, must be the type of a man and a woman who have grown old together in love and faith rather than the portraits of father and mother; though I hope they will pose for it. But they must know that it is a serious thing, which perhaps they would not see themselves if the likeness were not exact.

And they ought to be a little prepared that in case it might happen they would have to pose as I wanted and not change it. Well, that will come all right, and I do not work so slowly that it need be a great trouble for them. And I for my part would love to do it.

The simplifying of the figures is a thing which greatly preoccupies me. Well, you will see it for yourself from the figures I will show you. If I go to Brabant, it certainly must not be a kind of pleasure trip, but a short time of very hard and quick-as-lightning work. Speaking about expression in a figure, I come more and

more to the conclusion that it is not so much in the features, but in the whole attitude. There are few things I hate as much as most of the academical *têtes d'expression*. I prefer to look at "the night" by Michel Ange, or a drunkard by Daumier, or the diggers by Millet, and that well-known large woodcut of his, "The Shepherdess," or an old horse by Mauve, etc.

300

Dear Theo,

Before I go to Scheveningen, I want to have a chat with you. I have gained my point with de Bock that I have my *pied-à-terre* with him, perhaps I will also go to Blommers now and then. Now I intend to work principally at Scheveningen for some time, to go there early in the morning and stay there all day, or, if I must be at home, to be there at noon when it is too hot and go there again in the evening. I trust this will give me new ideas and rest, not by being idle, but by change of surroundings and occupation.

For the rest, I am head over ears in my work. To-day the almshouse man posed again for a thing that I suddenly felt I had to make before I started another thing. I must tell you that after all I have been again in the almshouse on a visiting day. Then I saw there the little old gardener, and have drawn him from out the window.

Well, I could not let that go, and I have got it fixed on paper in so far as I remember it by heart.

Last evening I received a present which pleased me enormously (from those two land surveyors—for there has come a second one since) viz. a very typical Scheveningen jacket with standing collar, picturesque, faded and patched.

I brought my painting material in order, as far as I could, and completed what was needed and laid up a provision of tramway tickets, etc.

This morning I saw the negatives of the three photographs. I long to see the proofs, and I hope in this small size they can be used as proofs for illustrations. I think I will also have a photo taken of that little gardener of to-day, for that figure is much, much more elaborate than in this scratch, and the surrounding is much less



tame than it is here. I hope to be able to send you the proofs of the photographs next week.

But, lad, I must ask you to try your utmost to send me some money, for I am already penniless through those expenses that were absolutely necessary to start Scheveningen.

It need not be much, but a little to get through the days and not to sit absolutely beggared in the dunes.

The photographs are: "Sower," "Potato Diggers," and "Diggers of Peat"; I think the last is the best. Don't you think



it nice of those land surveyors? They are jolly, merry fellows, who often have been good company to me.

They really begin to make nice sketches, but both have to take their final exam, one, that for land surveyor, and the other, that for engineer.

As soon as I have looked around a little at Scheveningen, I will take the woman with me now and then, to pose or at least to indicate the place and the size of the figures.

I long so much for your coming, lad, I hope there will be a few things among my work that you will like, and that you will see some progress. De Bock saw some of the painted studies of last year and

liked them, but they please me less and less. I hope to make better ones this year.

Next Sunday, the photographer will come to the studio. I want to talk over with him which among the figures I have are most fit to be photographed. I should be no little at a loss, if you absolutely could not send an extra. I only bought the strictly necessary things for the painting box, but hardly anything is left.

The Scheveningen jacket is a bit of good luck.

I wrote you once, that perhaps it would be the same with me as when I lived years ago at the Hague too, that at first it was a miserable time but became better afterwards, in many respects it has become better and more pleasant of late. Now, adieu. Do what you can, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

301

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, thanks for the enclosure, though I cannot repress a feeling of sadness about your saying: "I can give you little hope about the future."

If you mean this only in regard to the financial part I shouldn't mind it so much, but if you mean it regarding my work, I do not quite understand why I deserve it. It comes just at the moment that I can send you the proofs of photographs after a few of my latest drawings which I had promised you before, but I couldn't have them because I had no money.

I do not know what you mean by that expression, how can I know it? Your letter is too short but it hit me unexpectedly right in my heart.

But I should like to know what you really mean by it, whether you have noticed that I didn't make any progress or no.

You will remember that about the finances you wrote me a month ago the times were bad, my answer was: "All right, reason the more to try our utmost from both sides; do you try to send me the strictly necessary, I for my part will do my utmost to make progress, so that perhaps we can sell something to the magazines."

Since then I started several larger compositions in which was more of a subject than in single figure-studies.

So now my first sending of the photographs, for you to show to some artists falls together with your: "For the future I can give you little hope." Has anything happened?

It makes me nervous, you must write again soon.

As you see, the photos are: *Sower*, *Potato Digger*, *Diggers of Peat*. I've made others still: *Sand-pit*, *Burning of Weed*, *Refuse Tip*, *Potato Digger*, one figure, *Coal Heavers*, and now last week at Scheveningen I have been working on *Mending of Nets* (Scheveningen fisherwomen).

And then two other larger compositions of labourers in the dunes (one of which I showed to Tersteeg) which though they demand hard work still, are the things I should most like to finish.

Long rows of diggers—poor people employed by the municipality—before a patch of sand ground, which must be dug. But it is enormously difficult to make. In the "Diggers of Peat" you find the first conception of it.

It wouldn't make me so melancholy, brother, if you had not added something that worries me. You say: "Let us hope for better times."

You see, that is one of those things one must be careful of, in my opinion. *To hope for better times must not be a feeling but an Action in the present*. My actions depend on yours, in so far that if you should stop sending money I couldn't go on and would be desperate.

For the very reason that I felt strongly the hope for better times, I threw myself with all my strength in the work of the present, without thinking about the future otherwise than trusting the work would find its wages, though we must pinch ourselves as to food, drink and clothes more and more every week.

There was the question about Scheveningen, the question of painting. I thought: "all right, let us carry it through." But now I could almost wish I had not started it, lad, for the expenses are heavy and I cannot meet them.

The weeks passed by, many, many weeks and months of late, when the expenses every time were heavier than I could manage, with all my worrying and economising and however much I might

rack my brains. As soon as your money arrives, I must not only manage to live ten days on it, but I have so many things to pay at once, that those ten days which are ahead, are from the very first bound to be scanty. And the woman has to nurse the baby, and the baby is strong and in its growth, and it often happens that she has no milk for it.

And I also, at times, am sitting in the dunes or anywhere else, with a faint feeling in my stomach, because there is not enough to eat.

The shoes of the whole family patched and worn out, and many more such small miseries which give one wrinkles.

Well, I should not care, Theo, if I could only stick to the thought it will come all right, we must go on. But now that saying of yours: "I can give little hope for the future" is for me like "the hair that breaks the camel's back at last." The burden is sometimes so heavy that one extra hair is enough to force me to the ground.

Now what must I do—I saw Blommers twice at Scheveningen and spoke to him, and he saw a few of my things and asked me to come and see him.

I made a few painted studies there, a bit of the sea, a potato field, a field with menders of nets, and here in the studio, a fellow in the potato field planting cabbage in the empty spots between the potato plants, and then I have on hand the large drawing of the mending of nets.

But I feel my ardour vanishing, one needs a stronghold somewhere. When you say: "put your hope on the future," it sounds to me as if you yourself had no confidence in me.

Is it so? I can't help it, I am in low spirits through all those cares. I only wish you were here.

You say that the effect of the autographs is somewhat meagre. I am not in the least surprised when I think how a man's physique influences his work, and my life is too cramped and meagre. Really, Theo, for the sake of the work, we ought to have dined a little better, but I could not afford it, and it will remain so if in some way or other I cannot breathe a little more freely.

Therefore, please do show the photographs to Buhot or somebody, if you cannot send more yourself, and try to place something through his help.

I am almost sorry to have started painting again, for if I cannot carry it through I wish I hadn't begun it. I can't do without colours, and colours are expensive, and because I owe still a little to Leurs and Stam I cannot get more on credit. And yet I love painting so.

While I was at it, some things of last year caught my fancy again, and I have again painted studies hanging in the studio.

The sea which I love enormously, must be brushed in oil, otherwise one cannot get at it.

Look here, Theo, I only hope you won't get discouraged, for indeed when you speak of: "Giving no hope for the future," it makes me melancholy, for you must keep courage and energy to send the money, otherwise I'm in a fix and cannot get on, for those who might be friends have become enemies and seem to want to stay so. Think it over well that in fact I never did anything to account for this, at least cannot account for it, that for instance Mauve or Tersteeg or C.M. are so indifferent that they refuse to see my work or to speak a word to me. It is human to be angry about something, but to keep up that anger, even after a year has passed over it, and after repeated efforts to make it up, that is not right.

So for to-day, I finish with the question: Theo, when in the beginning you spoke to me about painting, and if we then might have foreseen my work of to-day, should we have hesitated in finding it right that I should become a painter (or draughtsman, what's the difference?).

I do not think we would have hesitated then to go on, if we could have foreseen these photographs for instance, should we, for surely it needs a painter's hand and eye to create such a scene in the dunes, in some form or other.

But now it often happens that I feel so downhearted when I see people behave so hostile and indifferent, that I lose all my courage. But then I cheer up again, and go back to my work and laugh at it, and because I work in the present, and let no day pass by without working, I believe that there is indeed hope for me in the future, though I do not feel it, for I tell you there is no space left in my brain to philosophize about the future, either to upset me or to comfort me. To stick to the present and not let it pass without drawing some profit from it, that's what I think duty. Do you



also try to stick to the present in regard to me, and let us persevere as far as we can persevere rather to-day than to-morrow.

Yet, Theo, you need not spare me if it is only a question of money; if as a friend and brother you keep a little sympathy for the work, saleable or unsaleable. If only I may keep your sympathy in this respect, I care very little for the rest, and we must calmly and deliberately find ways and means. In case of there being no hope for the future as to the finances, I should propose to move to the country, to some village *quite in the country*, saving half of the house rent, and for the same money one spends here on *bad* food, we should have good and healthy food, necessary for the woman and the kids, in fact for me too. Perhaps it would at the same time have advantages for taking models too.

You know I painted last summer—I have hung several of these studies again, because while making new ones, it struck me there was something in them after all.

Indirectly, that painting helped me in my drawing, during the winter months and spring, and I carried this on as far as these last drawings. Now, however, I feel that it would be good to paint for a time, and that I need this to get more time, also in the drawings. I intended to paint in rather large size, the women sitting in the grass mending nets, but after your letter I will give it up till I have seen you. I got more proofs of the autographs, but they are still weak; the man says he ought to have used more ink and he will soon give me some better ones still. “N’importe,” I have tried the experiment of making a sketch for illustration, in small size.

O, Theo, I could make so much more progress if I could spend a little more. But I can’t find the way out, everywhere I am handicapped by expenses. When I read the story of some other painters, I see they all needed money and were miserable if they could not go on.

Do write soon, for I feel upset, and in doubt if I dare go on with Scheveningen because of the expenses for painting material it brings.

I have spoken to Breitner since, about the sketches of those three compositions. It was indeed so that he had made them in a moment when he was not himself. He said he was sorry to have made them so, and showed me a changed composition of the drunkard, and studies of common hussies that were infinitely

better. And I also saw a few water-colours he had on hand, and a picture of a smithy that were done with a calmer and firmer hand and mind. I read a book he lent me: "Sœur Philomène" by De Goncourt, who wrote "Gavarni." The story happens in a hospital; it is very good.

I had hoped that you could have sent something, at all events, especially if you have no money, you must write me soon, for it is hard to keep courage as things are. I think the drawings from which the photographs are taken not yet deep enough of tone; they do not express enough the emotion stirred by nature, but if you compare them with what I made in the beginning, to the figures I made at first, I think I am not mistaken if I see a current of progress, and we must not lose hold of this current.

So let us try to drudge on.

I only wish you could come here.

At all events write soon. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I do not approve, Theo, of spending more than one receives, but when it is a question of strike or work on, I vote for working on to the utmost.

Millet and the other predecessors have worked on till the sheriff seized them, or some have been in prison, or have had to move hither and thither, but I do not see that any one of them has given up his work.

And I am only in the beginning, but I see it from afar as a dark shadow, and it makes my work gloomy sometimes.

302

Dear brother,

Sunday night.

It may be feverishness, or nerves, or something else, I don't know, but I don't feel well. I think of that expression in your letter in regard to different things, perhaps more than is necessary I hope. And I have an uneasy feeling that I cannot shake off, though I have tried to distract it.

There is no reason for it, is there? If there is anything, speak out then, what kind of obstacles there may be.

At all events, write too, by return of mail if possible, whether there is something or not. I can't help it, if there is no reason for it, but all at once I'm in the dumps. It may be reaction after having overworked myself.

At all events, write soon, lad, did you get the photographs? I'm going to take a long walk to try and shake it off. Adieu,

Yours,

Vincent.

I have in fact no other friend but you, and when I am in low spirits, I always think of you. I only wish you were here, that we might consult once more together about moving to the country.

Except what I told you, there is nothing particular the matter with me, and things are going well—but perhaps I am a little feverish or so, I feel miserable. I had to pay right and left, landlord, paint, baker, grocer, shoemaker, Heaven knows what, and but little is left. But the worst is, that after many such weeks, one feels one's power of resistance diminishing, and is overcome by a great feeling of weariness.

If you cannot send at once, brother, try at all events to write to me by return of mail, if possible.

And as to the future, if there is some danger, tell it straight out, "*homme avisé en vaut deux*," it is better to know exactly what one has to fight against. I have tried still to work to-day, but I felt overcome, all at once, by a depression which I cannot exactly account for.

In such moments, one would wish to be made of iron, and regrets that one is only flesh and blood.

I had written to you early this morning, but when I had mailed my letter, it seemed all at once as if all my troubles crowded together to overwhelm me, and it became too much for me, because I could no longer look clearly into the future. I cannot say it in other words, and I cannot understand why I should not succeed with my work.

I have put all my heart into it, and for a moment at least, that seemed to me a mistake.

But, lad, you know it yourself, to what things in practical life

shall one devote one's strength and thought and energy? One must take one's chance and say, I will do a certain thing and carry it through. Well, and then it may turn out wrong, and one can feel shut in, as if by a wall, when people do not care for it, but after all one need not mind that, need one? I don't think one must worry over it, but sometimes it becomes too heavy, and one feels miserable against one's will.

And now I thought, I felt sorry that I had not fallen ill and died in the Borinage at the time, instead of taking to painting. For I am only a burden to you, and yet I cannot help it, for to become a good painter, one must pass many periods, and what one makes in the meantime is not bad exactly, if one tries one's utmost; but there ought to be people who consider it in its connection, tendency and aim, and who do not ask the impossible.

Things are looking dark just now. If it were only for me, but there is the thought of the woman and the children, poor creatures which one would keep safe, and feels responsible for.

The woman is doing well of late.

With them I cannot speak about it, but for myself it became too much to-day. Work is the only remedy, if that does not help, one breaks down.

And you see the trouble is, that the possibility to work depends on the selling of the work, for there are expenses—the more one works, the more expenses (though the latter is not true in every respect). When one does not sell, and one has no other income, it is impossible to make progress that otherwise should follow from its own accord.

It is so, brother, that more than I could bear the general state of affairs oppressed me and I tell you my thoughts. I only wish you would come soon. And do write soon, for I need it. Of course there is nobody but you to whom I can speak about it, for it does not concern other people, and they have nothing to do with it.

303

Dear brother,

Since I wrote you yesterday, I could not shake off an anxious and restless feeling, and last night it kept me out of sleep.

It is—shall I be able to go on or not—in short, that is the reason of my worrying.

You have the photographs now, and with those before you, you will be better able to imagine my state of mind than before you saw them. The drawings I make now are only a shadow of my intentions, but the shadow which has got a definite shape already, and that what I seek, that what I aim at, is not vague, but are things out of the full reality, which can only be mastered by patient and regular work. The idea that I should have to work by fits and starts is a nightmare to me. Nobody can work without money, to work with as little as possible is right I think, but the thought of being left absolutely without the strictly necessary, would make anybody depressed and melancholy.

O, Theo, the work brings its troubles and cares, but what is it in comparison to the misery of a life without activity.

So let us not lose courage, but comfort each other, instead of distressing or disheartening one another.

Now I have spoken to Blommers about my painting, he wants me to keep it up; I for my part feel also that having finished those last ten or twelve large drawings, I now come to a point where I must change my course, instead of making more in the same way. That about which I wrote you (and about which you wrote, too, our thoughts have met again), the meagreness or what is called depression, is the first thing to be conquered, that it may not become a chronic disease.

I really think it remarkable that you and I seem to have thought the same thing again, for though you wrote but a single word about it, it is what strikes at once in the two autographs and in the photographs too. Without that defect, they don't seem to me so bad.

I have been thinking of the ways and means to conquer it, but see no other help than to renew my energy and also my physical strength, for I am afraid it goes the wrong way. I absolutely need some money and must repair both my health and my painting box, otherwise I am afraid things would come to light afterwards that would be more difficult to redress. It is now in the beginning—the last drawings are even less meagre, here and there, than before.

If it might be, Theo, that I could find in some way, some help or sympathy, I think it would soon enough redress itself.

I could show you a like moment of depression in the history of



many a one, who has totally conquered it. Almost all the fellows who passed through the Ecole de Rome and who have been drudging assiduously for a time on the figure, show at the end of the course, relatively clever, relatively quite correctly drawn things, which, however, are not pleasant to look at, because there is something of "une âme en peine" in them, which they lose afterwards, as soon as they can move and breathe a little more freely. Now I don't consider myself as clever as those people, but without being under the constraint of a definite course, only for the sake of perfecting my drawing, I have forced myself to study the figure with assiduity, and through that very strain, by overworking myself, I have drifted into this depression.

I wish you could come soon.

I repeat, not for the sake of my pleasure or comfort, but for the sake of order and progress of the work, it would be well if my circumstances were a little easier. If you read this letter in connection with the photographs I sent you, I hope that you will see that I myself am perfectly aware of the weak points of the drawings, and that I see the means to remedy those weak points, and that I certainly do not refuse to work hard to conquer them, but at the same time, that I find myself before the difficulty how to get the necessary means for it. That I do not have them is not your fault, but neither is it mine, and "que faire, que faire?"

Taking rest is out of the question, but I think it would be a good thing to find distraction in change of subjects and style. After these figure-studies, I feel the need of looking at the sea, the bronzed potato foliage, the stubble fields, or ploughed earth. In order to save time, I have not spared myself, pinched on everything if I could only work on, but now I am absolutely drained. I can draw no more bills on my personal needs, on that side no drop can be pressed out, there is malady and depression.

Well, after all I hope to keep courage, whatever may happen, and I hope that perhaps a certain frenzy and rage of work may carry me through, like a boat is sometimes thundered by a wave over a cliff or sandbank, and can profit by a thunderstorm to save itself from wrecking. But such manœuvres do not always succeed, and it would be desirable to avoid the spot by tacking a little. After all if I fail what is lost in me, I don't care so much after all. But in general, one tries to let one's life bear fruit, instead of letting

it wither, and at times one feels that one has in fact also a life of one's own, which is not indifferent to the way it is treated.

But it is beyond my power. If I do not have an extra now and then, as soon as I receive the usual amount, I have to pay so much that little is left for the ten days that are ahead, on the last of which, one walks around with a very weak faint feeling in the stomach, and then such a path through the dunes gets the aspect of a desert.

At all events write soon, whether you find something in the photographs.

Adieu, a firm handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

304

Dear Theo,

Coming home from Scheveningen just now, I find your letter, for which many thanks.

Many things in it please me. In the first place, I am glad that the darkness of the future cannot change our friendship or interfere with it; further, I am glad that you will come soon, and that you find progress in the work. The division of your income, directly and indirectly, between no less than six persons, is certainly remarkable.

But the subdivision of my fr. 150 among four human beings, with all the expenses for models, drawing and painting material, house rent, is also rather remarkable, isn't it? If next year those fr. 150 could be raised by the work—I reckon the year begins with your visit—that would be delightful. We must hold counsel about it together.

It is a pity that my painting is not more advanced, yet I must explain that to you once more, from the very beginning.

When you were here, last summer, you gave me money to lay out in the necessary supplies. I had to pay Stam and Leurs then. I bought new things for which I paid in cash, and set to work. Besides, after some time, you wrote that you expected some money to come in, and that then "the colours and the painting box should not be lacking." But it was not to be so, for since that time, you

yourself have had some bad luck, as you remember. However, in the beginning of the winter, or rather towards the end of the autumn, I received some extra money. But there was Leurs to pay off again. I had continued painting through those autumn days even when it was so stormy at Scheveningen. Winter was before the door and I was afraid of making new expenses, as there was more to pay for coal, etc., and little was left of the extra.

Well, then I took models again, and certainly since then up till now, it has been a period in which I feel to have made progress in the figure.

But while making those figure-studies, it was absolutely impossible to buy colours or to make water-colours, for if you remember, you expected several times to be able to send, for instance in March, but then you yourself were obliged to draw on your account.

And you had to provide for the woman, and there was the incident with H.P. v. G. and afterwards business was relatively rather slack.

Well, sometimes I tried to carry it through, when there was the least chance of managing it. I have borrowed money from Rappard, I've had an extra remittance from father. But what was the result—it was like the beetle that is bound to a thread and can fly a little way but is fatally arrested by something. I began things, but at the end of the month, having paid the bills, I was hard up for weeks, sometimes almost without a penny.

So that I have not always been able to do what was, and is, in my heart. Well, we must not lose courage, we must try again.

I just came home with a few studies of marines, which might serve as basis for water-colours, like that very small one of the last bathers that I sent you once in a letter. We will try our utmost, but times are hard. That what I have just started, what is really necessary more than anything else, is the painting of figure-studies, but I don't see how I can afford it.

I have also had the studio altered.

It is so, that I myself have lived for a long time on hope.

But you will come soon—that's a good thing, at all events you will see then what I still have here, and you will see too that I have not been idle.

But I must try to get some new strength, if that succeeds, it will be high time to use it.

For my strength is failing, it is abnormal that I am tired when I walk a little distance, as from here to the post office, and that is actually the case. Oh, I don't give in of course, but I must try to remedy it.

Yet my health is not thoroughly or chronically upset; it has not been caused by excesses but by too long a time of insufficient and unsubstantial food. Now, what is most pressing this year is the painting.

I once more remind you of what I wrote already last year, but what slipped your memory, I think.

For colours I have to pay here the regular retail market price.

Would it not be possible for you to get me colours from Paillard or so, in a certain quantity at the wholesale price from the manufacturer himself? Undoubtedly that would be a step towards the possibility that colours would not be lacking. And I would be very glad if we could arrange it so that you deducted fr. 10 from your remittance every time. That would be fr. 30 a month, fr. 90 in three months, and I wouldn't have to trouble you every moment for a few tubes, but if I have the net price list I can give the order for three months. Will you think this over? I think it would be a good arrangement. Paillard or Bourgeois or whoever it may be, it does not matter. You as art dealer perhaps might be entitled to pay wholesale price.

I had another plan to try somebody else to let me have colours at wholesale prices, but having talked it over with him, I hear he cannot do it.

You must try and come soon, brother, for I do not know how long I shall be able to hold out. Things are getting too much for me. I feel my strength failing. I tell you plainly, that under such circumstances, I am afraid I shall never hold out. My constitution would be well enough, if I had not had to fast so long, but it was continually either to fast or to work less, and as much as possible I chose the former, till I have got too weak now. How to bear up against it? It influences my work so obviously and clearly that I don't see the way to get on. You must not speak to others about it, brother, for if certain persons knew it, they would say: "Oh, of course it's what we have foreseen and foretold long ago." And

not only they would not help me, but they would cut off all possibility for me patiently to regain my strength and to redress myself.

Under the present circumstances, my work cannot be other than it is.

If I can get over my physical weakness, I will try and make progress. I have put off again and again to take some nourishing food, because I had to provide for others and for the work. But now I am at my wits' end; no progress in my work can be expected before I am somewhat stronger. I have seen but too clearly of late that my physical condition influences it. I assure you that it is nothing but a prostration from overwork and too little nourishment. Some people who have spoken about me as if I had some kind of disease, would start it again, and that is a slander of the worst kind, so keep it to yourself without speaking about it when you come here. But the meagreness in my work is relatively a thing apart, and will change when I can get well again. That what I most long for is your coming, and that we may look over the work together, and see each other again.

Good-bye, and meanwhile try to write a little oftener, I need it so much. And many thanks for this last letter; have a good time if possible.

It will again be a question of fasting these next days till your letter arrives. Write as soon as possible.

305

Dear Theo,

This morning there came a man who three weeks ago had repaired a lamp for me, and from whom I bought at the same time some crockery, which he forced upon me.

He came to make a row because I had just paid his neighbour and not him, and accompanied it with the necessary cursing, noise, invectives, etc. I tell him that I will pay him as soon as I receive money, but that for the moment I am absolutely without, but that is adding fuel to the fire. I beg him to leave the house, and at last I push him outside the door, but he, perhaps having waited for this, seizes me by the neck, throws me against the wall, and then



full length on the floor. Now you see, this is the kind of small misery one has to face. Such a fellow is stronger than I, of course—he is not afraid. All the small tradesmen one has to deal with every day are of that same kind. They come of their own accord to ask you to buy from them, and want to have you for a customer, but if unluckily the payment has to be put off for more than a week they come to curse and make a row. Well, they are as they are, what can one expect, they are sometimes hard up themselves. I tell it you to show you that it is indeed urgent for me to make some money.

When I went to Scheveningen, I had still to leave a few waiting for their money. I am rather harassed, brother, there is so much worry and care. I long for your coming, because I should like to decide about moving or not. To keep things going here, I ought to earn a little more. Life is impossible here, because of that little that is lacking.

As far as the work goes, I am not unsatisfied, because all those little miseries do not influence my energy and do not prevent my still making a few things. At de Bock's, I left two small marines, one with a stormy sea, one with a calm one. I should love to go on with that kind of thing. Yesterday I painted a farm with a red roof under high trees. I think the painting of figure-studies would help me in a great many things. I started one of a boy in a potato field, and one in the garden near a matted (thatched) fence. I ought to be able to work at it with all my might. This morning's incident gave me a clear hint that it is my duty to find a way, and to go and live in a smaller house in the country, when it is impossible for me to earn a little more here. On the other hand, the studio here is comfortable enough, and there is no lack of beautiful things to paint. The sea is another thing one does not find everywhere.

What I told you about my feeling rather weak, is true. It has now settled into a pain between the shoulders, and in the veins, which I used to have already at times, but I know from experience one ought to be careful then, otherwise one becomes too weak and cannot get over it so easily.

I am afraid I shall have to give it up. Circumstances have been too much for me of late, and my plan to regain former friends by working assiduously and reasonably has fallen to pieces.

Theo, there is one thing we must settle—I do not mean that it

will happen directly, but the days might become more gloomy still, and in that case I should like to make the arrangement.

My studies and all the work that is in the studio, are decidedly your property. I repeat, at present there is no question about it—but it might happen for instance—because of not paying the taxes—that they sold my things; but in that case, I should like to bring my work safely out of the house. They are my studies, which I need for my later work, things which have cost me a lot of trouble to make.

In this street, there is till now not a single one who pays taxes, though they are all put down for different sums.

So am I, and twice the tax-valuers have come to the house, but I showed them my four kitchen chairs and rough deal table, and told them that I could not be ranged among those who ought to be taxed so high. If they found in a painter's house, rugs, pianos, antiques, they were perhaps not wrong in putting such a man down for a high tax, but as for me, I could not even pay my colour bill and had no articles de luxe, but children in the house, so there was nothing to be got from me.

Then they send me tax returns and warnings, but I didn't mind them in the least, and when they once came to ask for them, I said it was simply no use, that I had lit my pipe with them.

That I did not have the money, and that my four chairs and table would not fetch anything, even bought new—they were not worth as much as the sum for which they had taxed me.

Since then, they have left me alone, for several months already, and others here in the street do not pay either.

But now that we speak about it, in such a case, I wish I knew where to store my studies. Perhaps I could bring them to Van der Weele's. And my painting materials too. I always feel a certain hope, that when you come to the studio, you may find things that might be to somebody's liking, though they may have no fixed market value. Work is not what is lacking.

After all I don't feel discouraged at heart. On the contrary, I agree with what I read recently in Zola: "*Si à présent je vaux quelque chose c'est que je suis seul et que je hais les niais, les impuissants, les cyniques, les railleurs idiots et bêtes.*" But for all that, I would perhaps not be able to stand the siege if I stayed here.

I write about it because it is only just at the starting-point, and the device of going to live more cheaply may bring relief, even for the sake of less house rent, it is already decidedly urgent.

Van der Weele has got the silver medal for his picture, which he richly deserves. I am glad he has it.

I have thought much about that picture of Van der Weele's because I have seen it partly made, and I have talked it over with him, and I liked it at once. I think, Theo, that if I can work on regularly and calmly, in the future I too, shall be able to make something of the kind.

But at all events, I should first have to pass a period of assiduous painting, and for that, I ought to have the means, which as yet I am at a loss how to get.

Van der Weele has got the means by sacrificing half of his time to things which he does not do for his pleasure, but they give him the means to keep his painting box filled, and his larder, etc. Perhaps, perhaps, if among my work there might come something that people would care to buy, I could manage also. For the selling itself I would not care so much—if it were not for the sake of being able to go on; I tell you openly that from all the ideas about art which I picked up in that period at Goupil's—though my taste has not changed—when put in practice very few have stood the test. Things are not made as the art dealer thinks they are, and the life of painters is different, the study is different.

I cannot explain it exactly, but the saying of Daubigny: "*Ce ne sont pas mes tableaux que j'estime davantage, qui me rapportent le plus,*" is a thing which I believe now, but if I had heard it at the time of Goupil and Co. I would have thought that he only said it "*par manière de dire.*"

Adieu, lad, I am rather in the dumps. You see from what I tell you about my skirmish of this morning, that people use very little consideration towards me. If one wears a top-hat and the like, they would probably keep more at a distance. One has after all a feeling of self-respect, and such things are not pleasant. Well, I wish my work could bring some profit. Adieu, write soon, I long so much for your letters.

Yours,

Vincent.

I would see the future less dark if I were less awkward in dealing with people. To find buyers for my work is, without you, almost impossible, and with you it will be possible by and by. And if we try our utmost, it will stand firm and not perish. But we must keep together.

I for my part have a great longing to see you and to talk things over about the work. With de Bock and other painters I talk now and then, but I don't take them in my confidence, and they need not know about everything.

Of course I don't mind things like that little incident of this morning, but the contact with heaps of disagreeable things from the outside, makes one feel the need of just forgetting everything, by talking with somebody who fully understands things and sympathizes. The usual thing for me is to keep things to myself, and try to fight my way through. But for a man of feeling that is not sufficient, and one tries to find true friendship and confidence. For the very reason that at times I feel my health failing, and the strength to bear things diminishing, I tell you openly that I am sorely in need of having a quiet talk with you, and to see you again.

I have had a hard struggle this year to keep the studio going. It has been awfully hard sometimes to go on with the work. And I must try and renew my strength.

And in the time that must elapse before we see each other again—do write a little oftener if you can, that must be possible. I must go on with my work, and there is a feeling of prostration that overwhelms me again and again, a general faintness, a reaction after exertion, that comes back every time, and which I must try to remedy, otherwise it gets worse.

I would not say this to de Bock or so—but I trust you enough to tell it you, it is not the question of losing courage or giving up things, but of having spent more strength than there was to spare, and of being more or less exhausted. Taken all in all, the principal thing will be, that a good understanding remains between us and that we keep the friendship warm. If ill luck comes, we'll brave it, but, brother, let us keep faithfully together. I am the winning hand, for without you I should not have been able to go on as far as I am now. You don't win anything by it, except the feeling of helping somebody to a career who would otherwise be without one.

And who knows what we may still make together afterwards.

To get on with painting will still cost a lot of worry, but when you see the studies, I hope you will see that it is no humbug.

That I write to you so often now about want of money is because the need is high. One must not become too weak physically, and not be too much wounded in one's self-respect. If things become too bad, and one gets pressed too hard, it is duty to look around and try to better one's circumstances.

306

Dear Theo,

To my surprise, yesterday I received again a letter from you with enclosed banknote. I need not tell you how glad I was, and I thank you heartily for it. But they refused to change the banknote because it was torn too much. However, they gave me ten guilders on it, and it has been forwarded to Paris. If the bank refuses it, I will have to pay back the 10 guilders for which I had to sign a receipt, but if the bank changes it, I will get the rest later.

You write in your letter about the conflict one feels sometimes regarding the question whether one is responsible for the unlucky results of a good action, if it would not be better to act in a way one knows to be wrong, but at the same time knowing that one will come off unhurt—I know that conflict too. If we follow our conscience—conscience is for me the highest reason—the reason in the reason—we are tempted to think we have acted wrongly or foolishly, we are especially upset when more superficial people jeer at us, because they are so much wiser and have so much more success. Yes, then it is sometimes difficult, and when circumstances occur which make difficulties rise to an overflowing tide, one is almost sorry to be as one is, and would wish to have been less conscientious.

I hope you don't think of me in any other way but having continually that same inward conflict, and often very tired brains too, and in many cases not knowing how to decide in questions of right and wrong.

When I am at work, I feel an unlimited faith in art, and that I



shall succeed, but in days of physical prostration, or when there are financial obstacles, I feel that faith diminishing, and a doubt overwhelms me, which I try to conquer by setting to work again at once. It is the same thing with the woman and the children; when I am with them, and the little chap comes creeping towards me on all fours, crowing for joy, I have not the slightest doubt but everything is right.

How often has that child comforted me.

When I am at home, he can't leave me alone for a moment, when I am at work, he pulls at my coat or climbs up against my leg, till I take him on my lap. In the studio, he crows at everything, plays quietly with a bit of paper, a bit of string, or an old brush; the child is always happy. If he keeps this temper all his life, he will be more clever than I am.

Now what shall we say about the fact that there are times when one feels there is a certain fatality, that makes the good turn out wrong, and the bad turn out well.

I think one may consider those thoughts partly as a consequence of overwrought nerves, and if one has them, one must not think it one's duty to believe that things are really as gloomy as one supposes; if one did so, it would make one mad. On the contrary, it is reasonable to strengthen one's physique then, and afterwards to set to work like a man, and if that does not help yet *one must always continue to use those two means*, and consider that melancholy as a fatal thing. In the long run, one will then feel one's energy increase, and will bear up against the troubles. Mysteries remain, sorrow or melancholy remain, but that everlasting negative is balanced by the positive work which thus is achieved after all. If life were as simple, and things as little complicated as Goody Goody's story, or the hackneyed sermon of the average clergyman, it would not be so very difficult to make one's way. But it is not so, and things are infinitely more complicated, and right and wrong do not stand separately, no more than black and white do in nature. One must take care not to fall back upon opaque, black deliberate wrong, and still more, one has to avoid the white as of a whitewashed wall, which means hypocrisy and everlasting pharisaism. He who tries courageously to follow reason, and especially conscience, the very highest reason—the sublime reason—and tries to keep honest, can scarcely quite lose

his way I think, though he will not get off without mistakes, blunders and failures, and will not reach perfection.

And I think it will give him a deep feeling of pity and benevolence broader than the narrow-mindedness which is a special quality of clergymen.

One may be considered by neither of the parties of the least importance, and one may be counted among the mediocrities and feel one's self thoroughly an ordinary man among ordinary people, in the end one will obtain after all a rather steady serenity. One will succeed to raise one's conscience to a state of development so that it becomes the voice of a better and higher self, to which the ordinary self is the servant. And one will not return to scepticism or cynicism, and not belong to the foul mockers. But not at once. I think it a beautiful saying of Michelet, and that one word of Michelet expresses all I mean: "Socrate naquit un vrai satyre, mais par le dévouement, le travail, le renoncement des choses frivoles, il se changea si complètement qu'au dernier jour devant ses juges et devant sa mort il y avait en lui je ne sais quoi d'un dieu, un rayon d'en haut dont s'illumina le Parthénon."

One sees the same thing in Jesus too, who first was an ordinary carpenter and raised himself to something else, whatever it may have been, a personality so full of pity, love, goodness, seriousness that one is still attracted by it. Generally, a carpenter's apprentice becomes a master carpenter, narrow-minded, dry, miserly, vain, and whatever may be said of Jesus, he had another conception of things than my friend the carpenter of the backyard, who has raised himself to house owner, and yet is much more vain and thinks more of himself than Jesus did.

But I must not become too abstract. What I first want to do is to renew my strength, and I think when that has again risen from below the mark, I will get new ideas for my work, for trying to conquer that dryness.

When you come here we will talk it over. I do not think it is a question of a few days.

In a few days, when I shall have taken some more nourishing food than of late, I think I will get rid of my *worst depression*, but it is *deeper rooted* than that, and I wish I could bring it so far that I had plenty of health and strength, which is after all not impossible when one is much out of doors and has a work that one loves.

For it is a fact that now all my work is *too meagre and too dry*.

That has become as clear as daylight to me of late, and I don't doubt in the least but a general thorough change is necessary. I intend to talk it over with you *after you have seen the work of this year*, whether you agree with me about some measures, and if you agree with me, I think we shall succeed in overcoming the difficulties. We must not hesitate, but "*avoir la foi de charbonnier*." I hope they will change the banknote. I am so glad you have managed to send something, for I think it saves me an illness. I will let you know how the story of the banknote ends. And it would be a good thing if you could send again as usual by the first of August. I always think that in looking through the work together, it is possible that we shall hit on another plan for the future. I do not know what, as yet—but somewhere there must be work to do, which I can do just as well as anybody else. If London were nearer, I should try it there.

Know it well that I should be enormously pleased if I could make something that was saleable. I would have less scruples then about the money from you, which after all you need as much as I. Once more many thanks, good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

307

Dear Theo,

One of the reasons why I have sometimes thought of moving, might be remedied in another way. Yesterday and the day before I have been strolling about in the neighbourhood of Loosduinen. I walked from the village to the beach, and found there lots of corn-fields, not as beautiful as those in Brabant, but there must be mowers, sowers and gleaners there, all those things which I have missed this year, which was the reason that I felt the need of change at times.

I do not know whether you have seen that part. I had never been there before. I painted a study there on the beach. There are some fences or moles, piers, jetties, and very picturesque ones too, made of weather-beaten stones and twisted branches. I sat down on one of them, to paint the rising tide till it came so near me that

I had to rush away with my things. There between the village and the beach, are bushes of a deep bronzed green, tangled by the sea wind, and so typical one thinks at every moment: Oh, now that's *the* "Buisson" by Ruysdael. A car is running there now, so it is within easy reach when one has baggage or wet studies to carry home.

This is a scratch of the path to the beach.

During the walk, my thoughts were with you all the time.

I know you will agree with me, that the dunes around the Hague and Scheveningen have lost much of their typical character



in the last ten years, and got another more frivolous aspect, every year more and more.

Going back, not only ten, but thirty, even forty or fifty years, one comes to the period when they began to paint the dunes, etc., in their real aspect. At that time things were more Ruysdael-like than now.

If one wants to see things of a Daubigny, a Corot sentiment, one must go farther, where the soil is almost untrodden by bathing guests, etc. Undoubtedly Scheveningen is very beautiful, but nature is no longer virginal there; but that same virginity of nature struck me enormously during that walk of which I told you.

'This will give you an idea of the pier.

Rarely of late has silence, has nature alone impressed me in such a way. Those very spots, where nothing is left of what one calls civilisation, where all that is decidedly left behind, those very spots are those one needs to be calmed down.

But I would have wished you with me, because I think you would have had the same impression of being in surroundings as I imagine Scheveningen must have been at the time when the first Daubigny's appeared, and I found those surroundings full of a strong, stimulating power to undertake some manly work.

When you come, it will perhaps be fun to be there together, with nothing of civilisation around us, only a poor rickety shell-



cart on the white road, and for the rest, shrubs that look every one of them like the "Buisson" by Ruysdael. The landscape itself very simple, flat: Stretches of weather-beaten sand, hardly a little undulating.

I think if we were together on that spot, it would bring you and me in such a mood that we would not hesitate about the work, but feel firmly decided about what we have to do. Was it a casual harmony of my rather gloomy mood with those surroundings, or shall I find back there the same impressions in the future? I do not know, but when I again shall feel the need to forget the present and to think of the time when the great revolution in art began, of which Millet, Daubigny, Breton, Troyon, Corot are the leaders, I will go again to that same spot.



I wish you could see it, perhaps when you come we might take a stroll there together, the car brings one in a moment to Loosduinen, it goes even as far as Naaldwijk now. Those level grounds behind Loosduinen, it is exactly like Michel—and the lonely beach too.

When, after our last letters, I think less about the future than about the present, I still feel hope, that when you come, we will decide that I shall make for you a number of small water-colours, and perhaps some small oil-paintings, just for a trial.

If I could only manage to have money enough for me to carry on my painting vigorously this year.

That walk, all by myself, far away in the dunes, has quieted me, by making me feel as if I had not been alone, but had had a talk with one of the old painters of the time of Daubigny's beginning.

I would not wonder but you also would remember that spot, if you had once walked there.

While writing this letter, I have started a water-colour of that bush; of the other thing—the jetty—I painted a study, so at all events I have a souvenir of that walk, which I can show you when you come. And if you like, we can take a walk there together.

For the rest I am not quite myself yet, perhaps my stomach has become too weak, judging from the symptom of dizziness in my head, which is troublesome enough to make it urgent to try to remedy it. But enough of this.

So far I wrote yesterday. Now to-day—Monday—I can fortunately tell you the torn banknote has been accepted in Paris, and I have lost but little on it, having cashed all in all twenty-three guilders.

Now I have to talk over with you a thing of which I hope you will approve. In a former letter I told you my decided opinion that it would be unwarrantable if we did not try to profit by the wholesale prices of the colours, instead of always paying the regular market price, losing in this way  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. But because you did not answer to this last year, I thought that it would perhaps be difficult to order things for account of Goupil & Co. that were destined for more private use, and from my side I made some arrangements, which I had already superficially started before, in order to get the same thing without your being mixed up with it,

and I hope for Heaven's sake that you do not doubt of its being practical. You know that I give lessons to a land surveyor, well, his father has a drug-store and deals in colours, has in store the colours of Paillard, and has Mauve for customer.

For those lessons to the son I never got anything, but many assurances of good-will from the father. And availing myself of these, I said to him as follows: that undoubtedly he had in stock a certain number of incurrent tubes. That I could use them, however, and would take them from him at net price Paillard, on condition that in the future he would sell me the current tubes on the same conditions.

At first he made some difficulties, then he looked over his stock, and we made the arrangement as I told you. I take from him about 300 tubes, among which are several carmine and ultramarine, at *less* than net price Paillard, (ten guilders less on the whole lot, which, at net price Paillard, would cost more than 50 guilders) so that those 300 tubes cost me 40 guilders. Besides, it gives me the right to order in the future all colours I need at net price Paillard, thus with a profit of  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. I have not only that reduction on the oil—but also on the water-colours.

We can talk it over when you come. Of course I need not take or pay for those 300 tubes all at once, but in as many terms as I like, monthly for instance. But I am glad of it, because  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent will make a great difference, especially in the long run. In this way it will be more possible for me to continue my painting.

To-day I have bought a sketching easel and canvas. The former is very convenient, because it makes one less dirty than when working on one's knees out of doors. For the moment, I have about seven water-colours of this summer landscape. From the money you sent, I bought myself some nourishing food, but I do not have much of an appetite, as my stomach is in disorder, and I am afraid it will last some time before I get over it. I shall be glad when you come, I think it will be well for many things.

I hope you will be able to send the usual again about the first of August.

At all events, I am glad that I have some painted studies to show when you come.

I have a model, a peasant boy, who lives here in the neighbourhood, to whom I spoke about the painting of studies. He

could manage to go with me very early in the morning, quite far in the dunes for instance. Adieu, all best wishes. Believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter of yesterday and the enclosure. Fortunately they have also changed the other note for 23 guilders. So I have been able to pay off the most pressing debts, though not all, for there was so much to pay at once for colours I had used meanwhile.

I wonder if you intend to do as you did last year, first go home for a few days, and then come straightway here. Promise me that you won't speak at home about misgivings as to the future, or of the little chance of selling the work. At least not directly; let us first talk things over and see what there is. Theo, I long enormously to paint the potato diggers. I think it would be a good thing. And even if it were not sold, it would help us to make progress, as some people sometimes change their opinion when they have seen something they did not expect.

Well, I made a few studies for it already, but I have not been able to take enough models, and I feel sure of making them much better now if I could spend some more money on them.

It is exactly the right time now, therefore there can be no question of taking a holiday, for I keep at my work as best I can. But your idea of acting as Weissenbruch does is also mine. However, literally I *cannot* carry it out, because to go for two weeks to the polders would cost me more than to stay at home for two weeks, and I do not even know how to struggle through those first two weeks at home.

But for the rest, as I wrote you already, I am also quite absorbed in landscape, and make landscape studies or marines to give myself a change from the figure, and it does me good. But the figure after all draws me back, and even so strongly that I try to do whatever circumstances allow me; if I could go on as I liked, autumn would not pass without my making those potato diggers in question.

I do not know in how far the studies I paint from the drawings will be sufficient, but "*quand bien même*," I will try to make something of it.

Models are not easy to get at present, because there is much labour in the field, and I wish I could spend more on them, for then it would be possible to overcome that difficulty.

Well, as soon as I can possibly afford it—now it is absolutely impossible—I will try to get two men for a whole day out in the dunes, to pose for the potato diggers.

That would be the shortest and safest way, and I will try to do it. In the days that must elapse before you come I hope to still paint a few things. I don't feel quite well yet, but fortunately the work is so animating that as long as I am busy, I don't feel the weakness so much, but in the intervals when I am not before my easel, it overtakes me now and then. It is a kind of dizziness sometimes, and headache too, at times. Well, it is nothing but weakness. I have put off and put off taking more nourishing food, because there were other things more pressing, but it has lasted a little too long.

But you will understand that the work is rather important, and for the very reason that so much of it is done already I could not drop it now. You will see it for yourself when you come that it is necessary to go on firmly. You are right in saying that what I wrote you about the finances, weighs on your mind, but, on the other hand, we cannot now be far from the moment when I shall make something that is saleable, even if it be for a small price.

The work becomes more and more clear to me.

And when I think it over, it is only a question of hurrying or slackening in speed, and we will make up for it afterwards, even for the past, but after all it is a confoundedly thorny, difficult and hard time we are in now.

If it were possible for me to get enough money to have sufficient colours and models this season, things would clear up not a little, I think. At all events, it is a fine thing that you will soon be here.

A very heavy care has fallen upon my shoulders of late. Last year I repeatedly tried to paint figure studies, but they turned out so that it made me desperate. Now I have begun it again, and there is nothing now that keeps me back from carrying it out, because drawing comes so much more easily to me than last year. Then I

got in a muddle whenever I lost hold of my sketch while painting, and it took me a long time to make that sketch, so that when I only could have the model for a short time, I absolutely made a mess of it.

But now I don't care in the least if the drawing is wiped out, and make it only directly with the brush, and then the form stands out enough for the study to be of use to me. Therefore I say that I see my way more clearly before me. I know that I shall have to make many studies, but they will not cost me more trouble than the drawings, and therefore much painting must be done this year, and then there will come more light. I am fully convinced of that. So for this winter I intend to paint the same kind of studies for heads like those of which I sent you a few drawings. I would even do it now at once if it were not more important to get hold of figures in the field while the season is in full swing.

Van der Wee is out of town during the holidays—I heard he got the silver medal at Amsterdam for his picture: “The Loaders of Sand.” When he comes back to town I hope to see much of him, because I believe those potato diggers will take his fancy, and perhaps he would give me some useful hints for the execution of my plan. The same for Rappard when he comes back.

The first two figures I painted this year were done in the way I tried last year, first to draw, and then to fill in the outline. That is what I should like to call the dry manner. The other way is to make the drawing last of all, and first to find the tones without caring much about the drawing, only trying to put the tones in their right places, and then, by and by, to make the form and the subdivisions of the colours more exact. That makes the figure more surrounded by atmosphere and gives it a more mellow aspect, while the colours become more delicate, for the very reason that one often brushes them over, and mingles one colour with the other.

You will see the difference when the two first I made now remain in their present condition.

There is an exhibition of drawings that was held last year in the Gothic Hall, but I think it very meagre this year, and there is little one has not seen already before and then generally of better quality. There are a few drawings by J. van Berg which I found among the best that were there.



Generally it is so that Schipperus and the like are among the best. As to the painting of those potato diggers, I just now saw Van der Weele's last picture made, and at Rappard's I saw all the studies for the pictures he made last year. So that I can well imagine beforehand what will be the difficulties to overcome for the definite picture.

If I can just in the least afford it I will make a few studies for it in the dunes before you come, viz. I will go with my model to those fields behind Loosduinen early in the morning, or in the evening twilight. I think I can make something of it.

The composition of the drawing might be a little altered, and especially the effect more finished, but in general I would keep it so. I think the figures must stand out strongly, and all the rest in a violetish grey haze.

In the drawing I find the division of dark and lighter planes not simple enough, the figures being partly light and partly dark, and the ground likewise. Either the ground and the figures must be brought more in harmony and form a dark silhouette against a light sky,—or sky and ground must form together a grey vapourous whole, against which the tony planes of the figures stand out.

Both these effects exist, but that of the drawing is not right as it is now, for it is too dry, and too meagre, and because the figures have too many tones in common with the ground, they do not stand out, and the sky is no part of it. Well, the tone must become quite different, but the composition needs but little alteration.

It gives me a certain restful feeling to think that we shall see each other soon, and can consult together about how to go on with the work. Meanwhile, I will try and make a few new things, and therefore I should like very much to receive the money a few days before the 10th if possible. Then I should try to make those studies in the dunes before you come. I cannot afford it now, as I had so much to pay. You remember what you wrote about the possibility of being disappointed in your share of the profits in business. Well, I hope that catastrophe will not happen, but we must consider it a piece of good luck if it turns out well, and we must not lose a minute of the time that is still before us.

I should be very much astonished if, in the long run, some people did not alter their opinion about my doing or planning absurd things. I think you will see what I mean in the studies, and you will

remember some of our former talks on art. We must try to keep courage and persevere. A thing that gave me a good deal of courage of late is, that though I had not painted for several months, yet I believe there is progress in the *painted* studies of now compared to those of last year. It is because things of drawing and proportion, which then gave me a lot of trouble, have been mastered now, so that when sitting before nature, instead of having to think of two things at once, drawing and painting, I have only to think of the painting. Of course in the finishing one has to think of both together, but even that is different.

Well, I shall live these days in the hope of your coming. If I may have some chance with my painting, things will become a little easier perhaps.

The two weeks that must pass between now and your coming will not be easy to get through, however.

If possible think of what I asked you, to send something a few days before the 10th, for then I could try to make those figure-studies in the dunes before you come. Adieu, and once more thanks for your letter, and good luck in everything; believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Looking forward to your arrival, there is hardly a moment that my thoughts are not with you.

These last days I still try to paint several studies, so that you may see them at the same time. And that distraction by change of work does me good, for though I cannot do literally as Weissenbruch does, and go and stay in the polders for a few weeks, yet I do something like it, and to look at the green fields has a calming effect.

Besides, I decidedly hope in this way to make progress as to the colour. The last painted studies seem to me firmer and more solid in colour. So for instance a few I made of late, in the rain, of a man on a wet, muddy road, express the sentiment better I think.

Well, we will see when you come.

Most of them are impressions of landscape, I dare not say as well done as those that sometimes occur in your letters, because I still often am checked by technical difficulties—still there is something in them I think, for instance, a silhouette of the city in the evening, when the sun is setting, and a towing-path with mills.

For the rest, it is miserable enough that I still feel very faint, when I am not right at my work, but I believe it is passing away. I will decidedly try hard to lay up a provision of strength, for I shall need it to carry on the painting of the figure with a firm hand.

While painting, I feel of late a certain power of colour awakening in me, stronger and different from what I felt till now.

It may be that the nervousness of these days holds touch with a kind of revolution in my way of working, for which I have been seeking, and of which I have been thinking for a long time already.

I have often tried to work less drily, but it always turned out the same thing over again. But now that a kind of weakness prevents me from working in my usual way, this seems to help, rather than to hinder, and now that I let myself go a little, and look more through the eyelashes, instead of looking at the joints and analysing the structure of things, it leads me more directly to seeing things more like patches of colour against each other.

I wonder what it will lead to, and how it will develop itself. I have sometimes wondered that I was not more of a colourist, because my temperament decidedly seems to indicate it—but up till now it developed itself very little.

I repeat, I wonder how it will develop—but I see clearly that my last painted studies are different.

If I remember well, you have still one of last year, of a few trunks in the wood.

I do not think that it is really bad, but it is not what one sees in the studies of colourists. Some colours in them are correct, but though they are correct they have not the effect they ought to have, and though the paint is here and there laid on thickly, yet the effect is too meagre. I take this one as an example, and now I think that the last ones which are less thickly laid on are yet becoming more solid of colour as the colours are more interwoven, and the strokes of the brush cover one another, so that it is mellower and more like for instance the downiness of the clouds or of the grass.

At times I have been greatly worried that I made no progress with the colour, but now I am hopeful again.

We shall see how it will develop.

Now you will understand that I am very anxious for your coming, for if you saw also that there is a change coming, I should not doubt but we are on the right track. I dare not quite trust my own eyes as regards my own work. Those two studies, for instance, which I made while it was raining—a muddy road with a little figure—they seem to me exactly the opposite of some other studies. When I look at them I find coming back the sentiment of that dreary rainy day, and in the figure, though it is nothing but a few patches of colour, is a kind of life, that is not called forth by correctness of drawing, for there is so to say no drawing. What I mean to suggest is that in these studies I believe there is something of that mysteriousness one gets by looking at nature through the eyelashes, so that the outlines are simplified to blots of colour.

Time must pass over it, but at present I see in several studies something different in colour and tone.

Of late I often think of a story I read in an English magazine, a painter's story, in which appears a person whose health suffered also in a time of trouble, and who went to a lonely place in the peat fields, and there, in that melancholy nature, found himself again, and began to paint nature as he felt and saw it. It was very well described in the story, apparently by a person who was well up in art, and it struck me when I read it, but now of late I sometimes think of it again.

At any rate I hope we shall soon be able to talk it over and consult together. If you can, write soon and of course the sooner you can send the money the better it would be for me.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

Involuntarily, and without any definite motive, I add a thought that often occurs to me. Not only did I begin drawing relatively late in life, but it may also be that I shall not live for so very many years to come.

If I think of that, calculating coolly, as if I were making an

estimate of something, it is in the nature of things that I cannot possibly know anything definite about it.

But in comparison with different persons, whose lives one might happen to know, or in comparison with some people with whom one is supposed to have many things in common, one can draw some conclusions which are not altogether without foundation. Therefore, about the time I have still before me, in which I can work, I think I may presume without rashness: that my body will keep a certain number of years "*quand bien même*"—a certain number, say between six and ten for instance. I can assume this the more safely as momentarily there is no immediate "*quand bien même*."

This is the period on which I reckon firmly; for the rest, it would be speculating too much at random to dare fix something about myself, because it depends especially on those, let us say, first ten years, whether there will be anything after that time or not.

If one wears out one's self too much in those years, one does not pass forty, if one is strong enough to resist certain shocks, which then generally attack one, to solve more or less complicated physical difficulties, then from forty to fifty one is again in a new relatively normal tide.

But for the present, such calculations are out of the question; one can as I said only take in account plans for a period of between five and ten years. I do *not* intend to spare myself, nor to avoid emotions or difficulties—I don't care much whether I shall live a longer or a shorter time, besides, I am not competent to take care of my physique as for instance a physician can.

Thus I go on like an *ignoramus* but knowing this one thing: "*in a few years I must finish a certain work.*" I need not overhurry myself; there is no good in that—but I must work on in full calmness and serenity, as regularly and concentrated as possible, as briefly and concisely as possible. The world only concerns me in so far that I feel a certain debt and duty towards it because I have walked on that earth for thirty years, and, out of gratitude, want to leave some souvenir in the shape of drawings or pictures—not made to please a certain tendency in art, but to express a sincere human feeling. So this work is the aim—and concentrating in that one idea, everything one does is simplified in so far as it is not a chaos but all done with one aim in view. Now the work goes slowly—



a reason the more to lose no time. Guillaume Régamey was somebody who left little reputation I think (you know there are two Régameys, F. Régamey paints the Japanese, and is his brother), but he was a personality for whom I have a great respect. He died at the age of thirty-eight and a period of six or seven years had been exclusively devoted to the making of drawings that bear a very peculiar stamp, and were made while he was working not without physical difficulties.

That is one of many, a very good one among the very good.

I do not name him in order to compare myself to him. I cannot be ranked with him on one line—but I mention him as a special example of a certain self-possession and energy clinging to one inspiring idea, that difficult circumstances showed him the way to accomplish good work in full serenity. It is in this way that I regard myself—as having to accomplish in a few years something with heart and love in it, doing this with energy.

If I live longer “*tant mieux*,” but I do not count on it.

In those few years *something must be done*, that thought is my guidance in all my plans about the work. You will now better understand my desire to push on. At the same time, I have a certain resolve to use simple means. And perhaps you will also understand that I do not consider my studies apart, but always have on view the work as a whole.

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Dear Theo,

I was very glad to hear that you are on your way. Thanks for your letter and the enclosure.

I need not tell you how I long for your coming. I have been far from well of late—always the same thing, palpitations of the heart too, at times. I am afraid it will turn out at last that the heart will prove to be affected. Well, I do not know much about it, but I do know that you must not speak about it at home, or to anybody else, for fear of misconstruction in their ideas about my circumstances.

The only thing I want is to make some good work “*quand bien même*,” and there is a chance of doing this if we keep our serenity, may the future be dark or not. If I knew by what train you would

come, I would come to meet you at the station. And in case you might come while I was out, the woman can tell you where I am, for in order not to miss you, I go no farther from home than to the Binkhorst just over the way, to paint a few studies.

I wonder what you will say about the work, whether you will find something in it or not. Well, we shall see.

I am planning all the time to make a large picture of the potato diggers, though it might be only finished next year, and but half-finished this season. I think the composition might stay as it is, and I might just start it.

I am not competent to distinguish in how far my illness has a physical cause, or is only the consequence of overstrained nerves. It sometimes seems to me that I ought to have seen you between times and have talked over the work, but now you have come at last and I am quite sure that our being together will calm me at all events.

I hope we shall take some nice long walks together too.

Did I tell you that I found at Loosduinen thorn bushes exactly like the "Buisson" by Ruysdael?

It is in that neighbourhood that I intend to make studies for potato diggers. I hope to be soon all right again. I will try as hard as I can, for I hate it when I cannot go on with full strength. When I wrote to Rappard that I did not believe my only aim in life could be to preserve my health, I meant that there are circumstances when one has to choose between the work and not having to eat, or to eat and dropping the work (then namely, when the work brings expenses and for the moment yields no profit).

In some cases I prefer the former, and I do not think I am wrong, for our work remains, but we do not, and the principal thing is to create, and I would rather have a few years of that than years of brooding over it and putting it off. And I said to Rappard then, that I for my part thought there was truth in the mysterious saying: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for the Gospel's sake shall find it."

Adieu, boy, I hope to see you soon. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

(Postcard.)

Dear Theo,

Just now I received a letter from home (thank Father for it please. I had not received the letter when I wrote), and I see you intend to leave Breda 2.15 Friday. Please let me know if you change your plans, for I will come and meet you at the station. If you are in a hurry, we must make the most of the time we can be together. I have on hand a painted study for potato diggers. I hope it will turn out well.

I long very much for your coming; have a good time. A handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Do look at what is going on in the fields at Brabant, and try to get a peep at a weaver's interior in the village, they are so picturesque.

(After Theo's visit.)

Dear brother,

Coming home just now, the very first thing I want to do is to beg a favour of you—a favour which I do not doubt is necessary, because it will show you that my intentions are the same as yours—it is, not to hurry me in the several things we could not settle at once, for I need some time to decide.

As to my relative coolness towards father, I will explain that to you now that you mention it.

About a year ago, father came to the Hague for the first time since I had left home, for the sake of seeking peace, which I did not find there either. I was living already with the woman then, and said: "Father, as I cannot blame those who disapprove of my conduct, given the prevailing conventions, I purposely avoid those whom I think would be ashamed of me. And you understand: I will not trouble you and as long as my affairs are not in order, and I have not found my way, don't you think it would be better for me

not to come home?" If father had answered something like: "No, that's carrying things too far," I would certainly have felt warmer towards him, but father's answer was something between yes and no: "Well, you must do as you think best."

So, presuming they were more or less ashamed of me, which would accord with what you said, I was not very keen about the correspondence—neither was father, and neither his letters nor mine have been very intimate. This "entre nous," only to explain, not to draw any further conclusions.

There are two things to be done, when somebody stretches only a finger to us, one is to seize the whole hand, to obtrude oneself: the other is to drop the hand that is not warmly and cordially stretched out to us, or to disappear of one's own free will where one is only tolerated.

Have I been mistaken, "qu'en sais-je?"

Between you and me there is a bond, which by continuous work can only be strengthened by time, that is art, and I do hope we will after all continue to understand each other.

I am afraid I have said to you something about the work which I ought to have said differently, and I have a vague feeling of having hurt you by something, because there seemed to be something amiss when you left.

I hope it will redress itself.

About the work, that which becomes more and more clear to me, since I began to notice it, is the dryness of execution.

This would alarm me if I did not think it a natural consequence (which I have also discovered in the first work of a great many very sympathetic persons), a natural consequence of the great strain to overcome the very first difficulties. And looking back on the last years, I see them behind me full of troubles, which troubles, being overcome, I hope there will follow another period of work.

That fault is so continuous, and it is so urgent to correct it, that we must try to take such measures as will bring us a time of peace. That must be the first thing, otherwise it remains so. As my work is so am I. You must bear a little with me. I do not know whether you think it would be better to go and see *now* people like Herkomer, Green, or Small, or to *wait* till the work as well as myself has become a little more calm. I should prefer the latter; things can clear up within me, perhaps soon, but for the

moment I had rather not trust myself in the complicated London business.

About the few things you said to me when you left, I hope you will not forget that for instance about my dress, etc., is rather exaggerated. Is it indeed as you say? Well I am ready to plead guilty, but it seems to me to be an old point of discord that turned up again, rather than to be grounded on recent observation, unless when I am working out of doors in the fields or in the studio.

If you really want to help me in this, you must not hurry me.

Last year I have been, so to say, quite without any social intercourse.

And it is true I have not minded at all about my clothes.

If that is the only thing, it is not so difficult to remedy, is it? Especially now that I have that new suit of yours.

I only fervently wish that they would forgive me such incorrectness instead of talking about it.

If it puts me out of temper, it is because I have heard so much about it already. At one time I have dressed well, another time less so, and it is like the story of the farmer, his son and the ass, the moral of which is known to you, that it is difficult to please everybody.

From you it did not make me angry so much as it surprised me, because you know how much worry it has given me already, and that it has become a bit of slander that will never die out, whatever I may do. Well, at all events, I have now that new suit of yours, and that old one, that is quite good still. So for the present there is an end of it, and no more about it.

And now I will tell you once more what I think about selling my work. My opinion is the best thing would be to work on till amateurs feel drawn towards it by their own accord, instead of having to praise or to comment upon it. At all events, when they refuse it or do not like it, one must bear it calmly and with as much dignity as possible.

I am so afraid that the steps I might take to introduce myself would do more harm than good, and I wish I could avoid it.

It is so painful to me to speak to other people.

I am not afraid of it, but I know I make an unfavourable impression. The chance of changing this is sometimes checked by the fact that the work would suffer if one lived differently. And by sticking to the work, things will come right in the end. Take, for



instance, Mesdag, a real mastodon or hippopotamus, but he sells his pictures. I am not so far yet, but the man I mention also began late and worked his way along an honest, manly path, whatever he may be for the rest. It is not from laziness that I leave some things undone, but rather to be able to work more, leaving aside everything that does not belong directly to the work.

If I were only a little more advanced, so that my work would be more saleable, I would decidedly say I leave the business part to you, I will not have anything to do with the selling. I will live quite outside that circle.

But now alas I cannot speak so yet, and that is not your fault, but for the sake of the interests of us both and for the sake of peace, I beg you to have patience.

I am awfully sorry that I am a burden to you—perhaps things will clear up—but if you stagger under it tell me so plainly. I would rather give up everything than put too heavy a burden on your shoulders. Then I will decidedly go at once to London to work at “*n’importe quoi*,” be it carrying parcels, and I will leave art till better times, at least the painting, and having a studio. When I look back in the past I always hurt myself against the same never quite cleared up fatal facts which occur in the months August 1881 till February 1882.

That is why, involuntarily, I always mention the same names. Which seemed to astonish you.

Dear brother, don’t think of me in any other way than as an ordinary painter, who stands before ordinary difficulties, and do not think it anything unusual if there are troubles.

I mean, don’t think of the future as a black nor as a dazzling light, it will be better to trust in the grey.

I try to do the same, and think it wrong in myself when I deviate from it. Good-bye.

Yours,

Vincent.

About the woman—I do not doubt, but you will understand that I will not be brusque in things from my side.

I must refer again to what you said on leaving: “I begin to think more and more like father.”

Well, that may be so. You speak the truth, and I for my part,

though I do not exactly think and act in that way, I respect that character, and know perhaps its weak point, but also the good one. And when I consider that if father knew something about art, it would undoubtedly be easier for me to talk with him and to agree with him. Suppose you become like father, plus your knowledge of art—all right—I think we will continue to understand each other.

I have very often quarrelled with father, but the bond between us has never been quite broken.

Well, let nature simply follow its own way in this; you will become what you must, I too will not remain exactly the same as I am now; let us not suspect each other of absurd things and we will get on together. And let us not forget that we know each other from childhood, and that thousands of other things can bring us more and more together.

I am a little worried about what seemed to trouble you, and I doubt if I know exactly what was the matter, or rather I believe it finds less its cause in one decided thing but more in the fact that there are some points in which our characters disagree, and you understand one thing better, I another.

I think it would be well for us both to try and keep together.

One thing—if I become too much of a burden to you—let the friendship remain, though you might help me less in money matters. I will grumble now and then—but it will be without mental reservation and more to give vent to my feelings than that I should expect or demand from you that you could do everything, which you know I would not do, lad!

I feel guilty of having said things that I should like to take back if need be, or wish to have left unsaid—or even if you should admit that there was a grain of truth in them, they ought to be considered as very exaggerated. For know it well, that the main thought, the one compared to which all the others fade to nothing, which will remain so however the future may be, is a feeling of gratitude towards you.

Further, *if* I might be less happy in the future, I would in no case—I repeat in *no case*—you understand—even if you had quite withdrawn your help—I would never consider that your fault.

It would be superfluous to say this if under the influence of my nerves, which were too upset, I had not expressed myself as if in the past you might have done more. Forget that, please, consider it as

unsaid. I think if certain things will come right, time will bring them so, when I am calm. But in my nervousness, I reproach now one thing, then another. So with other things that I will not repeat now, though I always remember afterwards even what I said in my excitement, and there is relatively always a grain of truth in it; but not all principles hold good, and in nervous excitement they often seem more important than they are. For my part, though it seemed something was the matter when you left, I will let it drop.

Indeed I think of what you said and wrote you about my clothes, that I do not refuse, and think you are perfectly right that if I ever went to see Herkomer or others, they would pay attention to my appearance, but I know that myself without your saying so. Further, what you said about father—now there was occasion to write more often to him than usual and you will read the letter yourself. And so with everything. In short, when I give an opinion about persons, circumstances, society, in which I do not move, you can understand that I do not always hit justly, but let my fancy play without a view to reality, and see things very fantastically just as things stand out strangely against the light.

You that are nearer to them, do not understand how it is possible that they appear in this way, seen at a distance from the back. And even if I should see things quite wrongly, anybody that thought about it, would understand perhaps, that given such and such circumstances, I could hardly speak differently. Where things have gone wrong is a short period, and that short period cannot but continually take a place in my thoughts, and I think it natural that that moment must have a reaction still in the future, because persons though they avoid each other on purpose yet in course of time must fatally face each other again.

313

Dear brother,

I wish you were able to see that in several things I must be consistent.

You know what in painting is an error in one's point of view, viz.

something far different and far worse than a faulty drawing of such or such a detail. A single point decides the greater or lesser slope: the development more to the right or left of the sideplanes of the objects throughout the whole composition.

Well, in life there is something like this.

When I say I am a poor painter and have still years of strife ahead—my everyday life I must arrange “à peu près” like a farm labourer or a factory hand does, then this is a fixed point, from which result many things, which one tears from their roots, when one considers them otherwise but in general. There are painters in other circumstances who can and must act differently.

Everyone must decide for himself. If I had had other chances, had been in different circumstances, and if no decisive things had happened, of course that would have influenced my actions. Now however and “à plus forte raison,” if there were only the slightest question of it being considered arrogance on my part to assume a right to which I had no claim—even if I had a right as a matter of course—but the mere suggestion of the thing would have made me withdraw of my own accord from any intercourse with people who occupy a certain rank in life, even from my own people.

So this is the fact: My firm resolve to be dead to anything except my work. But it is very hard for me to speak about those things, simple in themselves, but which unfortunately touch much deeper things.

There is no anguish greater than the soul's struggle between duty and love, both in their highest meaning. When I tell you I choose my duty, you understand everything.

A simple word said about it during our walk, made me feel that absolutely nothing is changed in me in that respect, that it is and remains a wound which I carry with me, but it lies deep and cannot be healed. After years it will be the same as it was the first day.

I hope you understand what battle I had to fight in myself of late.

It was this: “quoiqu'il en soit” (not taking the *quoi* interrogatively for I have not the right to examine it) I will do my utmost to remain an honest man and doubly attentive to *duty*.

I have never suspected her, nor do I now, nor shall I ever suspect her of having had financial reasons as her motives, more than is honest and just. She went as far as was reasonable, other people

exaggerated. But for the rest, you understand I presume nothing about love for me, and what we talked on the road remains between us. Since then, things have happened that would not have been, if at a certain moment I had not stood in the first place before a decided "no," and secondly before a promise that I would not stand in her way. In her I respected a sentiment of duty—her I have never suspected, shall never suspect her of anything mean.

Of myself I know this one thing, that it is of the greatest importance not to deviate from one's duty, and that one may not compromise with duty. Duty is absolute. The consequences? We are not responsible for them, but for the initiative of *doing* or *not doing* our duty, we are. This is straightway the opposite of the principle: The end justifies the means.

And my own future is a cup that will not pass unless I drink it. So "Fiat voluntas."

Good-bye—good luck on your journey—write soon—but you understand that I trust in the future with serenity, and without one line in my face revealing the struggle in the deepest depth—

Yours,  
Vincent.

You understand, however, that I must avoid everything which might tempt me to hesitate, so that I must avoid everything and everybody that would remind me of *her*. In fact that idea has made me this year sometimes more resolute than I otherwise would have been, and you see that I can do it in such a way that nobody understands the real motive.

314

Dear Theo,

(August 19th '83.)

Together with this letter I write one to father, in which stand a few things which I need not now write twice. Be so kind as to read father's letter. In this letter to you, I will say once more that it seems to me more and more the most practical and direct way to make progress with the work is not to look too far or to aspire too high. When I think of London, that is an animating thought,



know that well, but the question is only, is it *now* to be done? Is it *now* the right moment? Is it not better in fact to say straightway to myself: "don't think yourself ripe enough yet, because what you will and mean does not seem comprehensible enough yet to those who see it, as they are, so to say, more or less frightened by it—go on still—work faithfully and firmly after nature. Seek it once more quite in nature, on the heath or in the dunes, and don't mind for the present that those who have seen it do not think much of it yet. Don't go on showing it, don't think of approval in London directly—it must grow better still. All these things I say to myself, and after having considered what I write here about the woman, you will perhaps also find that there are reasons for hesitating about going to London directly. I cannot decide yet.

But a simple thought, which seems good to me, just because of its simplicity, is that I should take no other step, but to go and live cheaper, somewhere in the country, where the scenery is characteristic. I am anxious to know whether father or you can enter into my feelings about staying with the woman. I should wish it were possible, in so far, that instead of sending her out in the street again, we might respond to her promise to better herself, by a cordial pardoning and forgetting.

It is better that she were saved than that she were ruined.

This morning she says to me: "As to what I did formerly, I do not even think of it, and have not spoken of it to mother either. I only know that if I have to go I shall not earn enough, especially as I shall have to pay board for the children, and if in that case I walk the street, it will be because I must, not because I want to." I think I wrote you once what passed between us when she was in the hospital, and I had not yet decided whether I should take her in the house or not. She never asked anything then either, which contrasts very much with her more ordinary ways of doing.

I cannot say exactly what her expression was, but it was something like a sheep that would say: "if I must be slaughtered, I won't try to defend myself." At any rate, something so pathetic, that I can only pardon fully, aye, feel guilty myself rather than that I should accuse her. However, I kept this to myself, and made her promise several things, that she would be more orderly, more zealous, pose better, not to go to her mother, etc.

And now I have completely forgiven and forgotten, without hidden thoughts, and I take her part just as I did before.

It is a heartfelt pity, which is so strong that everything gives way before it, and I cannot act otherwise than last year in the hospital, and I say now as I did then, as long as I have a crust of bread and a roof above me it is yours. It was no passion then, it is no passion now, it is understanding each other's wants as vital facts. Knowing now however how her people upset her last year, and fearing she might fall back again, I should like to live with her somewhere in a little village, where she saw nothing of the city and could live a more natural life. However, I have known from the beginning that her constitution wanted *years* to recover, and so there is hope still.

Well, the little chap actually dotes on me. Now that he begins to creep and to stand, he is always at my side wherever I go in the house.

Look here, Theo, by acting according to what we feel, firmly and decidedly, I think we may fall into mistakes, may several times meet with deceptions, but I think we will be saved from great evil and from despair if we ask what is our duty—and do what ought to be done as well as we can.

Now about the work, I do not doubt it has its faults, but neither do I doubt that I am not quite wrong, and that I shall succeed, be it after a long time of seeking.

And I do believe that it is dangerous to look for success anywhere else but simply in the work.

I wish I had Mauve or Herkomer for instance as a friend. However, that is not the most important thing I believe, neither would they consider it as the most important. By working on faithfully, it may last a longer or a shorter time, be more or less successful; sooner or later one will meet among the painters the friend for life, as for instance M. or H. might be.

And perhaps it will come *sooner* if one goes on quietly with the work, than if one goes *to beg for it*, or visit people, which for me has the lesser chance of success, because of some things of eccentricity in me, which you notice even more than I, though I notice them myself too now and then, but do not think them so bad, that I should not be *astonished* about the continuous obstacles in finding some sympathy in people. Suppose that my faults are so bad and

as obvious as those of, for instance, the woman, then I should wish that some people did for me what I do now for the woman, and have done already several times, forgive, not only in part, but thoroughly, as if nothing had happened, or would happen again. If you have said something to C. M. about my leaving the woman, perhaps, please take it back at once; I cannot do a thing which proves to be cruel or unmerciful. Whether I shall be happy with the woman in the future, I do not know, and it may be not—it will certainly not be perfect—but happiness is not the thing for which we are responsible, but what we are responsible for, is in how far we follow our conscience.

Adieu, lad, let me hear from you while you are still at Nuenen. I cannot speak differently.

You must just read father's letter.

If I deserted the woman, she would perhaps go mad, but because I have already often found the way to calm her, in her fits of unbearable temper, by quieting a fear that oppressed her, because in the course of this year she had learnt to understand that she has found in me a true friend, on whom she can lean in her weakness, who understands her troubles, it has given her a feeling of rest when I am with her, and in time I hope she will improve, especially if she is no longer attracted by what draws her back to the past, of which she had better not be reminded.

To move to the country would be a good thing, but must be at the same time a measure of economy. Things have been said to her, for instance, that I should leave her because of the children. That is not true, that would never be my reason, but it is one of the things that upset her, and make her wish she did not have the children.

Theo, it is so with her that she does improve, but one has to show her the same thing over and over again, and she can make one discouraged, but when—what rarely happens—she tries to say what she means and thinks, it is wonderful how pure she is, notwithstanding her prostitution. As if, far deep in the ruin of her soul, and heart, and mind, something had been saved.

And in those rare moments her expression is like that of a "Mater Dolorosa" by Delacroix or like certain heads by Ary Scheffer.

That's what I believe in, and now that I have seen it again, I respect that depth of feeling and don't speak about her faults.

I hope, boy, you will see a few beautiful sunsets over the silent quiet country, far away from the city, before you go back to the city. As to the change of residence, I know that I could find it in more than one place.

But of course we do what must be done, in all calmness, and we will still write each other about it.

Adieu, have a good time and know that whatever the future may bring, I keep hope for better times.

Yours,

Vincent.

315

Dear Theo,

You will understand that I am longing to hear from you, if you have read my letter. As to myself, I think the cheapest way will be the most reasonable for me in the given circumstances—I think I shall have to move to a village.

If you can continue to send the fr. 150 a month, I think it will be almost or quite sufficient.

Dear brother, there does not seem to be a little more ease in store for me. I will try not to complain, I will bear what I can.

Though I stick to my conviction that the work demands in fact more, and that I also ought to be able to spend a little more on food and other necessities, yet if I must do with less, be it so. After all my life is perhaps not worth the money, why should I worry about it. And it is nobody's direct fault, neither is it my own.

But of one thing I hope you will be convinced—that it is impossible to do *more* than stint oneself even in food, clothes, every comfort, every necessity. When one has skimped in everything, there can be no question of ill-will, can there? You know very well that if somebody said to me do this or that, make a drawing of this or that, I would not refuse it, aye, even would make with pleasure several trials, if the first did not succeed. But nobody said so, or only so vaguely, so in general, that it puts me out rather than helps me.

As to my clothes, dear brother, I put on what was given me, without wanting more, without asking for more. I have worn

clothes from father and from you, which sometimes do not fit me as they ought, because of the difference in our size. If you will drop the question of defects in my dress, I will remain content with what I have, and be grateful even for little, though of course in after times I hope to remind you of it and say: "Theo, do you remember the time when I walked about in a long parson's coat of father's," etc., and it seems to me that it is infinitely better *now* to take things as they are and afterwards, when we shall have made our way, to laugh about it together, rather than to quarrel about it now.

For the moment, I have the suit you brought me for when I must go out, and more things that are still quite fit. But you must excuse me that I do not put them on in the studio, or when I work out of doors, it would be spoiling them recklessly, for one always gets some stains while painting, especially if one tries to catch an effect even in rain and storm.

My idea about earning money is as simple as can be, it is that it must come through the work, and that nothing can be gained by going to speak with people about it.

Yet whenever there is a chance I try to catch it—as, for instance, what I told you about Belinfante, about Smulders, but till now, fortune favoured me but little. Well, never mind, if only you do not upset me by suspecting me of ill-will.

For I think if you consider things seriously, you will not doubt my working hard, and if besides you would *demand* from me my going to ask people to buy from me, *I would do so*, but perhaps then I would become melancholy.

Let me go on as I have till now, if possible. If not, and if you want me to go and see people with my work, I do not refuse to do so, if you think it better.

But, brother dear, human brains cannot bear everything; there is a limit. Look at Rappard who got brain fever, and had to travel as far as Germany to recover. It makes me nervous more than is good for me if I try and go to speak with people about my work. And what is the result? A refusal, or being put off with fair promises. It would not make me nervous if it were you, for instance, who know me and with whom I am used to speak.

I assure you, I feel less energy for my work when I have been among people. If we do not lose time now by that kind of thing,



we'll make slow but sure progress, and I do not know a better way. In no case would I refuse any serious order, whether to my liking or not. I would try to make it as is wanted, do it over again, if necessary.

Well, I make up my mind *in no case* to become impatient, even if people would purposely put obstacles in my way.

More than that I cannot say, and if you will see for yourself, you can make more than one trial. I am at your disposal.

I think there is a difference between now and former years. In former years there used to be more passion both in the making and in the judging of the work. They chose deliberately this or that direction, they took energetically the part of one or the other.

There was more animation. Now I think there is a spirit of capriciousness and satiety; people are in general more lax. Some-time ago, I for my part, wrote you already, that it seemed to me, there was since Millet, a strong decline noticeable, as if the top had been reached already and the decadence had begun.

This has its influence on everybody and everything. I am always glad that I have seen the collection of drawings by Millet in the Hôtel Drouot at the time.

At this moment you are at Neunen.

I wish, brother, there were no reasons why I should be absent. I wish we walked there together in the old village churchyard, or looked in at a weaver's. That cannot be now—why not—oh, because I feel I should be a *trouble-fête* in the present mood.

I repeat—I do not quite understand it, and think it is rather going too far—when you as well as father feel ashamed just to walk with me. For my part I keep away, though my heart longs to be together.

Because I cannot spare that one little moment of seeing you or father without mental reservations, only for the sake of indissoluble ties, I wish we would never again speak about the question of manners or dress when we meet again. You see in everything that I draw back as far as possible instead of pushing myself forward.

But do not let decorum breed a general estrangement. That one bright moment—of seeing each other once a year must not be darkened. Adieu.

Yours,

Vincent

About the work I do not hesitate.

You have read "Fromont Jeune et Riszler aîné," haven't you? Of course I do not find you in Fromont Jeune, but in Riszler aîné, in his being absorbed in his work, his resoluteness *there*, for the rest a bonhomme and rather careless and short-sighted, wanting little for himself, so that he himself did not change, when he became rich, I find some likeness to myself.

About my work, all my ideas are so well ordered, so decided, that I think you will do well to accept what I say: let me go my own way, just as I am, my drawings will become good, even if we continue as we did till now, but as their turning out well depends a little on the money for my charges and expenses—and not only on my efforts—be about the money as liberal as you can, and if you see a chance of finding any help from another side, don't neglect it. But in these few lines I have in fact said everything I have to say.

You must not let yourself be deceived about my real character, by my conduct when I left Goupil's. If business had then been for me what art is now, I would have acted more firmly. But I was in doubt then whether it was my career or not, and I was more passive, when they said to me: "hadn't you better go," I replied: "You think I had better go, so I go"—no more. More things have then been left unsaid than brought out.

If they had acted differently then, if they had said: "We do not understand your behaviour on this or that case, explain it," things would have turned out differently.

I told you already, brother, that discretion is not always understood. "Tant pis," perhaps. Now I think it is better that I have the career I have, but when I left Goupil's there were other motives than dress, on my part at least.

There was a kind of plan then, to give me a position in London in the new gallery, in the picture department, for which, in the first place, I didn't think myself fit, and in the second place, I didn't like it. I would not have minded staying with Goupil if my work had been other than entertaining the visitors.

In short, if they had asked me then: "Do you like this business?" my answer would have been, "yes, sure"—do you care to stay? "Yes, if you think me worth my wages, and do not think me a nuisance or troublesome."

And then I would perhaps have asked a position in the printing office, or that one in London, but a little modified, and I think I should have got it.

But they have not asked me anything, but only said: “Vous êtes un employé honnête et actif, mais vous donnez un exemple mauvais pour les autres.” And I have not said anything in reply because I did not want to influence on my staying or not.

But I could have said a lot of things in reply, if I had cared to do so, and such things as I believe would have made it possible for me to stay.

I tell you this, because I do not understand why you do not know, that the reason then was quite another one than my way of dressing.

Now—to you—I say what I do not doubt is right to say, as my profession is my profession, and I do not hesitate, but I must stick to it. So I say to you this: not only do I wish to keep things as they are between us, but I am so grateful for our relation that I do not mind the question of being richer or poorer, having an easier or a more difficult life, accepting on silent terms that I am content with every condition, and that I will agree and yield to put up with everything, if it must be.

The only thing I want you not to doubt of, is my good-will, my zeal—and to accord me some common sense, and not suspect me of doing absurd things, and that you will let me live on quietly in my own way.

Of course I must make trials to find things and have failures, but in the end, the work will come all right.

To have patience till it turns out well, not to give up before the end, not to doubt, that is what I wish you and I together would do and continue to do. If we stick to that I do not know in how far we will have financial success, but of one thing I feel sure, that—*on condition of unison and harmony*—we shall be able to continue our life long, sometimes not selling anything, and having hard times, then again selling and living more comfortable.

That is the long and the short of it. The success depends on our will to stay together, as long as that remains, it is possible. Now I mention again “Riszler aîné” (I think you know the book, otherwise you must read it, and you will see what I mean) and I draw your attention to the fact how that man’s appearance was more or less like mine, that he spent his life working at his drawings and

machines in the garret of the factory, caring for, or minding nothing else, his greatest luxury being to take a glass of beer with an old friend.

Mind, the plot of the novel does not matter at all here, other things in the book are of no consequence, but I draw your attention to the character, the way of living of Riszler aîné itself, *without arrière-pensée of anything else in the story*. In fact only to explain to you that I think little of my clothes because my way of working—my way of doing business if you like—is a personal thing, is *not* having to go and see other people. The few friends I shall make for myself later on, will take me as I am, I hope.

I think you will understand this latter, and will understand that it does not make me angry when things are said to me about my clothes. No, it makes me inwardly more and more calm and concentrated, and it would take quite other things to make me angry. Wherever I should come, I should always be about the same—perhaps I should everywhere really make a bad impression in the beginning. But I doubt if that impression should remain for ever, with those persons to whom I should speak about it intimately.

Well, from this moment I am again quite absorbed in my work. Do for me what you can, think for yourself what can be of use to us, and hasten the success. I do not doubt of your good-will and your friendship.

Good-bye, have pleasant days and write soon. Adieu.

Vincent.

316

Dear brother,

Your letter came to-day and comforted me in many respects. My thanks for speaking to C. M.—I will write to thank him myself, send him a few studies, but—especially about the woman—*nothing*. One thing more however. One of these days I will write you a letter, which I will write carefully and try to make short, yet to say in it everything which I think is necessary. You might keep that letter then, that in case you may meet somebody, who perhaps could be induced to buy some of my studies, you could tell that man exactly my own thoughts and intentions. My thought in this

being especially: one of my drawings taken apart will never in length of time satisfy completely, a number of studies, how very different in detail they may be, will yet complete each other. In short, for the amateurs themselves it is in my opinion better to take a number of them than a single one. As to the money, I would rather deal with an amateur who buys cheaply but regularly than a single buyer, even if he paid well then.

Now I have still to tell you of a visit from Rappard, who saw the large drawings and spoke warmly of them. When I told him I felt rather weak, and that I thought the making of the drawings might have something to do with it, he did not seem to doubt this being very probable.

We spoke about Drenthe together. He goes there again one of these days, and he goes farther still, namely, to the fisher villages on Terschelling.

I for my part should love to go to Drenthe, especially after that visit from Rappard. So much so, that I have already gathered information if it would be easy or difficult to move the furniture thither.

The furniture can be sent by Van Gend & Loos, even the stove and the bed, by taking half a luggage-van, then little or no packing-cases are needed.

Of course I think about it, because though those things of mine are of little or no value, it would be a great expense if one had to buy them all over again.

My plan would then be to go with the woman and the children.

Of course there will be the moving and travelling expenses.

Once there, I think I would remain permanently in that country of heath and moorland, where more and more painters settle down, so that perhaps, after a time, a kind of colony of painters might spring up. Life is so much cheaper there, that I think I would economise at least 150 or 200 guilders a year, especially on rent.

And having paid my debts with the money from C. M., I think it would perhaps be well to act quickly.

In fact I think it would be superfluous for me to go there first to gain information.

I have a little map of Drenthe lying before me. I see on it a large white spot without names of villages, it is crossed by the Hoogetveen canal, which ends suddenly, and I see the word Peat-fields on the



map, written across the blank space. Around that blank space, a number of black dots with names of villages, a red one for the little town of Hoogeveen.

Near the border, a lake—the Black lake—a name full of suggestions, I imagine all kinds of dredger men on its banks.

Some of the names of the villages like: Easthills, Erica are also suggestive. Well, tell me your opinion about the possibility of a quick moving to that part.

If it happened, I would begin by following Rappard's information from there, then I would follow his advice to go more to that secluded part of which I told you how it looked on the map.

I am trying now to get a more detailed map of Drenthe indicating the different grounds.

We should have a direct expense, but in the long run, we should economise a lot, I think. But of more importance, I think, would be that I should find myself in a country that would certainly stimulate me, and have a serious influence, so that my work can only improve by it.

What would the expenses be? I will figure that out more exactly for you one of these days.

I suppose the whole family will be reckoned for  $2\frac{1}{2}$  persons, but they can demand the fare for three.

The railway expenses are not given in the time-table, but I suppose it will be under ten guilders a head.

Half a luggage-van to Assen is according to Van Gend & Loos twenty guilders. But one should have to spend a few days in an inn which would cost a guilder a head a day.

Here the rent especially, and the high cost of living besides are killing. And the heaviest expense, that for models, would be different yonder, either I should have for the same money more and better models, or with less money just as many.

I suppose if I settle down there, Rappard would visit that same neighbourhood even more than now, so that we could profit a little from each other's company. As I told you, it was especially since his visit and our talking about the work, that my idea fixed on Drenthe.

Of course, if it must be, I can also look for a cheaper house here, and I think it beautiful here too, but yet—I should like to be alone with nature for a time—far away from the city.

I can hardly tell you how pleased I am, with what you say about the work, I am glad you are of opinion that it would be a wrong policy to take some outside job in hand at the same time.

This leads to half measures, which make half a man of one.

The most important thing is to get in my work *more and more* that "quelque chose de mâle."

That you notice something of it already, I don't believe you will need to take it back, especially if I regain my strength.

It is very troublesome that my stomach cannot bear even the most ordinary food, and if I indulged myself I should only care to eat—sour apples. I don't indulge myself in this, but my stomach is weaker than it ought to be.

I expect another letter from Rappard about Drenthe. At all events I will write you again soon, also about another plan of staying quietly here, when I have had information from my landlord about the house at Voorburg, which he says I can perhaps get cheaply.

Adieu, again many thanks.

Yours,  
Vincent.

317

Dear Theo,

This morning I was at Van der Weele's and saw the studies he had brought from Gelderland. And my longing to go to Drenthe grew no less by what I heard from him. As luck would have it, he knew of one of the villages I had in mind, the landscape there is beautiful and full of character.

I said to him again that I was sorry I had not learnt more about painting this year.

His answer was: "Oh, don't bother about that, in the first place, everybody has his own weak points, if he learns from somebody else, the result is often that he gets the faults of his master besides his own, go your own way quietly and without worrying about that." Well, at heart I think exactly the same, except that I would think myself too self-conceited, if I did not always remain on the lookout to learn something from others. But it must perhaps be con-

sidered a piece of good luck, if in this way one hears or learns something from another.

You will get a small proof of how little firm the woman's character is, when I tell you that notwithstanding her recent firm promise not to go and see her mother again, she has been there after all. I told her that if she could not keep such a promise even for three days, how could she expect me to find her fit to keep a promise of faith for ever.

For I think this very mean of her, and must almost suppose that she belongs more to those people, than to me. Then again she says that she is very sorry but—to-morrow she will do it again, that's what I begin to think of it, but she says—"oh no." In this way, I am almost sorry that I take things seriously. When I made her promise it, I said to her: "In three ways it is a kind of prostitution when you go there, in the first place, because you used to live with your mother, and she herself set you on to walk the street. Then because she lives in a very low neighbourhood, which you, more than anyone else, have reason to avoid, and finally your brother's mistress lives in the same house."

However it is not absolutely impossible that when she lives for instance for sometime in the country, away from all that family, she will keep straight, but who can give me the assurance that yonder she will not say: "What a miserable hole, why did you bring me here?" She makes me afraid of such things, even when I try my utmost to avoid the extremity of leaving her.

That what Zola says, seems to me to be true: "*Pourtant ces femmes-là ne sont point mauvaises, leurs erreurs et leurs chûtes ayant pour cause l'impossibilité d'une vie droite, dans les commerces, les médisances des faubourgs corrompus.*" You know what I mean, from "*l'Assommoire.*"

I know there is difference too, but there are points of resemblance also between my relation towards her and that passage in "*l'Assommoire*" where that blacksmith sees how Gervaise goes the wrong way, and he has not the least influence on her, because in her hypocrisy and because she does not see things clearly, she cannot make up her mind what part to take.

I pity the woman more than ever, because I see she is more restless than ever. I think she has, for the moment, no better friend than I who would help her with all my heart, if she would let me.

But she does not seek my confidence, and makes me absolutely powerless, by trusting those who are in reality her enemies. I am amazed that she does not see that she acts wrongly—or does not want to see it, that's what I think sometimes. That period, when her faults made me angry is past, I went through it last year. When *now* I see her falling into the same errors, I am no longer astonished, and if I knew it would save her, I think I would put up with them. Because my opinion of her is such that "*quand bien même*" I do not think her bad, I do not think her bad, she has never seen what was *good*, *how can* she be *good*.

I mean she is not responsible, like somebody who understands the distinction between good and evil. That understanding has only come to her by intuition very vaguely and confusedly. I think if she knew what was right to do, she would do it.

What you said—that you believe it would do her good if she left me—is a thing which I myself would think probable, if she did not go back to her people—in the first place, and secondly, if she had not to leave the only thing that keeps her relatively straight—her children. It is a case for which I see no way out. I do not know whether you understand it, as I explain it, but the matter stands so—"au fond" she wants to stay with me and is attached to me, but she does not see how she estranges herself from me, and when I say anything about it, she answers—"Yes, I know it quite well, you don't want me to stay with you."

Well, that's in her good moods, and the bad ones are more exasperating still. Then she says openly: "Yes, I am indifferent and lazy, and I have always been so, and that cannot be helped," or—"yes, it is true I am an outcast and the only end for me will be to drown myself."

If I think about that neglected character of hers, half or rather quite spoiled, one might almost call it dragged through the gutter; then I say to myself—"after all she cannot be different from what she is," and I would think it stupid and conceited of myself, if I condemned her with big solemn words. Perhaps you will better understand now than before, how I came to apply to her, what Father Bienvenue in Victor Hugo's "*Misérables*" used to say to ugly, even venomous insects: "*Pauvre bête ce n'est pas sa faute qu'elle est ainsi*," and you will understand that I would love so much to save her, that if, for instance, I could do so by marrying

her, I would marry her even now. But would it save her? If once in Drenthe she kept dinning in my ears, "why did you bring me here," we would not be much advanced.

The thing I hope you will not object to, in the given circumstances, in the necessity of going on, after ripe consideration, my intention being to stay with her, if she herself does not make it absolutely impossible; I repeat the thing I hope you will not object to, is—my carrying out at once the plan of going to Drenthe. Whether the woman goes with me or not, depends on herself, *I know* she deliberates with her mother. I do not know *what*. I do not ask it either.

But if she wants to come, do let her come. To leave her, is to drive her back to prostitution, how *can* this be done by the same hand that tried to save her from it?

For the *work* and for *economy* Drenthe is the best thing we can do, in my opinion, and I think you will see it in the same way. So leaving her out of the question for the moment, we continue to execute that plan if you approve of it. On the moment of leaving, I will say to the woman, "will you come or stay?" *If* she comes with me I think I will have more influence on her there, and make her behave better.

To-day I have sent a number of studies to C. M.

I am very glad with your *revised* opinion about the work—your revised opinion tallies with that of Rappard—Van der Weele also thinks there is something in my work. I, for my part, believe that there is in every painter's life a period of making absurdities, and of myself, I think that period is already a long time behind me. Further, I think that I make progress slowly but steadily, and that the work I make now, afterwards through better work, will get a *reflection* which will show more clearly, that there is even now already, something of truth and simplicity in it, and as you yourself express it, a manly conception and sentiment.

So that, if now you find something in a study, you will not need to retract that opinion, and later better work still will not make you indifferent to the first.

Last year Weissenbruch already said something like that to me,—go quietly your own way, and in your old age, you will look back with satisfaction on your first studies.

To paint much, is the principal thing now. That, and to



replunge myself once more in nature's serenity on the heath, will bring us victory in the end—do not doubt of it—and progress from one month to another.

These days I'm very busy painting, I have several studies of the wood. Adieu, and write soon.

Yours,  
Vincent.

It will be the same with the painted studies as with the drawings. Afterwards when I shall have made more progress, people will see that a certain figure, a certain bit of scenery, already bears a personal character.

Well, if things go well, I still hope to send you this autumn some studies from Drenthe.

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Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I want to answer it at once. It may be true what you write—we talked it over already, I often thought so myself, that if the woman would be obliged to leave me, to shift for herself, she would keep straight. But as she has two children, it is a very difficult case, but what shall I say—it is a thing which she brings about herself, but which the *circumstances bring about still more*. I underline the latter.

Do you know what I have done, I had to-day a quiet day with her, I talked it over with her seriously, explained to her fully how things stand with me, that I *must* go away for my work, and *must* have a year of few expenses and some earnings, in order to make up for a past that has been rather too much for me. That I foresaw, if I stayed with her, I should very soon not be able to help her any more, and would get into debt again here, where everything is so expensive, and there would be no way out. So that in short, she and I must be wise and separate as friends. That she must get her people to take the children, and that she must look for a place.

And it is so evident that I cannot go on here, that even she understands it. And as we are both for the moment hard up, and

make things worse by staying together we agreed to separate for a time, or for ever if things turn out so. I add, or for ever, because she has in her children, and I in my work, an object to live for, "*quand bien même*," and we shall have to do things against our will, and perhaps we shall not be able to be as good as we might wish. I told her: "Perhaps you will not be able to keep quite straight, but go as straight as possible, I will try to do the same, but I know beforehand my course in life will be far from straight always."

So I say, "As long as I know that you try your best and don't lose hold of *everything* and that you are good to the children, as you know I have been to them—if you only act so that the children always find in you a mother, though you are but a poor servant, though you are but a poor whore, with all your damned faults, you will always in my eyes be *good*. And though I do not doubt for a moment that I have the same kind of faults, I shall not change I hope in this respect, that when I see a poor pregnant woman, I shall try to do what I can to help her." I said: "if you were in the same condition as when I found you, well, you would find a home with me—a shelter in the storm as long as I have a piece of bread and a roof over my head, but now it is different, the storm is passed, you can go a straight way without me, I think—well, you must try to. I for my part, must also try to find a straight path, I must work hard, you do the same." That's the way I spoke about it.

O brother, you see how it is, we would not part if we didn't have to. I repeat we would not part if we didn't have to. Have we not forgiven each other's faults each time, and made it up again? We know each other so well, that we can see no evil in each other. Is it love, I do not know, but there is something between us that cannot be undone.

As to what must be done now—you see I do not want to waste my time either, I want to work on, straight on, vigorously—as to painting, I want to do what must be done. I know that I cannot be wrong in this, that is to say, I do not know *how* the result will be for her or for me if I push on vigorously, but it will certainly turn out better when I cut myself a path alone, than if we both came to a dead stop by staying together, and putting a spoke in each other's wheel.

Now I come back again to Drenthe.

Can you perhaps find a way for me to get the money to go there alone? Perhaps I could leave the furniture here, renting a corner of an attic from my landlord.

But the sooner the better. I want to be free of that heavy house-rent, you see, and I want to leave here as soon as possible. It is necessary for my work. Drenthe, Katwijk, Brabant, never mind which, to live for a time with a peasant, far, far away in the country, far away, alone with nature.

And then I must paint much, and be able to spend a little more on painting materials.

I have talked over everything again with Van der Weele. He has been an afternoon in the studio, has seen my studies one by one, several of them we have painted over together, to show me some points of technique.

Well, he has given me some useful hints. And before I leave, one of these days he will again devote some of his time to showing me a few things.

Wisselingh has also been to see me one morning. It was very pleasant—he said I was more advanced than he expected—we lunched together and talked about old times.

He greatly encouraged me, so did Van der Weele, but the painting cannot be avoided. I must—let me say it openly, try to paint a hundred serious studies. You see I must *carry that through*. And those studies must have practical subjects too. Bits of characteristic nature. Wisselingh will buy something from me sometime, perhaps very soon, and we agreed that this autumn already, or against winter, when I shall have been for a time quite in the country, I will send him something, and will continue to do so, so that he will remain in touch with me, whether he buys or not.

I said to him, “write me about what I shall send you, then I will continue in that line which you think most practicable.”

As to C. M. I sent him more than twenty studies, so I think he cannot be dissatisfied—besides he can exchange them for others afterwards.

As you have not much to spare yourself, I want to suggest to you to explain the thing to him, that it would be good for me to go to the country to paint on regularly for a time. That we would try to do so without his help, but that it would be of such great importance, if in case of need, he would not quite withdraw his

help in the future. You see, there is a possibility now of making both ends meet, and yet to do what the work demands, as to painting. A farmer in Drenthe charges a guilder a day for board and lodging. In the beginning I should like to keep in touch with the woman as much as possible, and send her a little money, but even so, the cares will be less heavy, and the studio must be dispensed with for a time. The furniture stored in a corner of a garret till better times. And then without luggage, without company, a way for study. Write me soon what you think of it. I wish you would write at once, after having read this letter, what you think of it.

To-morrow I will give notice to my landlord, and arrange with him so that I can store my things here somewhere.

The woman goes to look for a place. And meanwhile I work as hard as I can. As to my going somewhere else, I wait for your letter, and then we will see what we can do. I hope it will be a way to get over the difficulties. Adieu, lad, all good wishes, have some luck in business, believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

319

Dear Theo,

I received your letter just now, coming home from the dunes behind Loosduinen, wet through, for I had been sitting in the rain for about three hours, on a spot where everything reminded of Ruysdael, Daubigny or Jules Dupré. I came back with a study of twisted, gnarled, little trees, and another of a farm after the rain. Everything is coloured bronze. Everything is what one can see in nature only at this time of the year, or when one looks at some pictures of Dupré, for instance, and it is so beautiful one can hardly imagine it. You write about your work that Sunday in Ville d'Avray; on that same moment of that same day, I too was walking alone, and I too would tell you something about that work, when probably our thoughts again met. I had spoken to the woman as I wrote to you—we felt that in the future it would be impossible for us to stay together, ay, that we should make each other unhappy, yet we felt on both sides how strongly we are attached to each other, and then I went out in the country far away, to have a talk with nature. Well, I walked to Voorburg and from there to Leidschen-

dam. You know the scenery there, splendid trees, majestic and serene, side by side with horrible green toy summer-houses, and all the absurdities the heavy fancy of retired Dutchmen can imagine in the shape of flower plots, arbours and porches. The houses, most of them very ugly, some, however, old and stately. Now at that moment, high over the meadows, boundless as the desert, one mass of clouds after the other came sailing on, and the wind in the very first place broke against the row of country houses, with their clumps of trees on the other side of the canal, bordered by the black cinder path. Those trees, they were superb ; there was drama in each *figure* I was going to say, but I mean in each tree. But the whole scene together was more beautiful still than those scourged trees viewed apart, because at that moment even those absurd little summer-houses assumed a curious character, dripping with rain and dishevelled.

It seemed to me an image of how even a man of absurd manners and conventions, or another full of eccentricities and caprice, may become a dramatic figure of peculiar type, if only real sorrow strikes him—a calamity touches him. And the thought crossed my mind, how society to-day in its fall, at moments seen against the light of a renewal, stands out as a large, gloomy silhouette.

Yes, for me, the drama of storm in nature, the drama of sorrow in life, is the most impressive.

“ A Paradou ” is beautiful, but Gethsemane is more beautiful still.

Oh, there must be a little bit of light, a little bit of happiness, just enough to indicate the shape, to make the limbs of the silhouette stand out, but let the rest be gloomy.

I must say that the woman bears up well. She is unhappy about it, so am I, but she is not disheartened and keeps busy. I had just bought a piece of stuff to make study linen of and have now given her this to make underwear for the kids, and some of my things can be altered for them too, so that she will not leave me empty-handed. So she is very busy sewing these things.

When I say we part as friends, it is true—but the parting is final, and after all I am more resigned than I thought, because her faults were such that for me, as for herself, it would have been a fatal thing to be bound together, because one is, so to say, responsible for each other's faults.



But I ask myself anxiously—how will she be after a year?

I will certainly *never* take her in my house again, but I do not want to lose sight of her, for I am too fond of her and the children.

And for the very reason that it was and is a feeling different from passion, this is possible too.

I hope the plan of Drenthe may be carried out.

You ask me what I should need ?

I need not tell you that I intend to work hard. I must do that in order to renew myself. And down there no painting material whatever is to be had, so about taking some in store, the more the better of such things as are really useful. Good materials are never thrown away, and though they are expensive, one makes up for it afterwards, and a lot of painting must be done in order to make progress. I hope to lose very little of the time I shall spend there, and hope often to have models, which probably will be much cheaper there.

And life is cheaper and I will be able to do more with the fr. 150 there than here.

But I can arrange all that according to circumstances. I wish I could have a large sum to spend, because I need so many things that others have, and which one can hardly do without.

My intention is to make in Drenthe so much progress in painting that when I come back I may be qualified for the Society of Draughtsmen. This stands again in connection with a second plan of going to England.

I don't think it wrong to speculate, if one only does not do it in the air, or on too unsolid a basis. This in regard to England.

I certainly expect it will be easier for me to sell there than here, that is true, so I sometimes think of England, but I do not know in how far my work will please the English amateurs, and as I do not know that, I will first make a small positive beginning in selling, before I think it advisable to try it there. When I have only sold a few things here, then I hesitate no longer, but begin to send things or go there myself.

But as long as I sell absolutely nothing here, I could easily be mistaken in the right moment, if I were not wise enough to wait till I see a beginning here. I hope you will approve of this idea ; that would comfort me, for in England they are very serious, when they once start a thing: whoever takes the fancy of the public in

England, finds faithful friends there. Take for instance Ed. Frère and Henriette Browne, who remain as interesting now as they did when first their work was shown there.

But to have success, one must give good work, and be sure of keeping up to the standard of what one has sent.

I was glad to see from your letter that you approve of the plan for Drenthe ; that's sufficient for me, the advantages it will bring will show themselves afterwards. For me, it stands in direct relation to trying to become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen, and then of going to England—because I know for sure that the subjects yonder, if I succeed in putting some sentiment in them, will find sympathy in England.

Well, I must carry out the plan of Drenthe, be it with more or less money. As soon as I can pay the fare, I go, even if I have little provision of painting material.

Because the moment of the autumn effects is already there, and I must catch hold of some of them.

But I hope I shall be able to leave something behind for the woman, to help her through the first weeks. But as soon as I *can* go I *will*.

I tell you that I intend to help the woman a little at first, I *may* not nor *can* I do much, but I mention this only to you.

And you may depend on what I say, that whatever may happen to her, I will not, nor can I ever live with her again, for she is incapable of doing what she ought to do in that case.

I do *hope* everything will come right, but her future as well as my own looks gloomy. I do believe there is some good latent in her still, but the trouble is, it *ought to have been* roused already. Now when she has nobody to rely on, it will be more difficult for her to follow her good impulses.

*Now* she did not care to listen, *then* she will long to speak with me, and I shall no longer be there. As long as she was with me, she had no other standard of comparison, and in other surroundings she will remember things for which she did not care now and which she did not mind. *Now* by contrast she will be reminded of them.

Sometimes it is for me an anguishing thought, that we both feel it is impossible for us to struggle together through the future, and yet are *so* much attached to each other. She is more open with me of late than usual, and she has refused to play me some ugly tricks

which her mother had instigated. Things of the kind you mentioned when you were here, of making a row or the like.

You see there is in her a beginning of more seriousness, if that might only stay. I wish she could marry, and when I tell you I keep my eye on her, it is because I advise her to do *that*.

If she could but find a man who was not altogether bad, that would do ; the foundation that was laid here would then develop itself, namely that of a more domestic, simple disposition, and if she sticks to that, I need not leave her in the future quite to her fate, for then I remain at least her friend, and a true one too.

Write soon again and believe me,

Yours,  
Vincent.

320

Dear Theo,

In my last letter I could not give you details about my plans which I can do now to some extent. I begin by telling you about the woman, that what I suspected already has proved true, that she was already making arrangements about the future, even *before* I had decided to part. For the very reason that I was almost as sure of it *then*, as I am *now*, that I know exactly what her plans are, I had to decide to part.

The decision once taken, I want to carry out my plan of moving promptly and firmly.

The first measure to take, was to give notice to my landlord—that has already been done.

The second measure is about my furniture, which would only be a burden to me, and cause expenses at a time when I do not know exactly where I would settle down. It remains here in the house *in the garret* ; I made an arrangement with my landlord about it.

You will ask me if I intend to come back to the Hague? No, but for instance in half a year, or a year, I shall have to come into contact again with some painters here, when I shall have made progress in my work, when I shall have a lot of studies of the real country.

And then I will probably take for a studio, a very comfortable room, or rather annex, from this same landlord, in his own house at Voorburg, not at the Hague, which will be more advantageous than to live in the city, which I will not easily do again.

So I am rid of all the superfluous ballast, and at the same time I know where to go, when I come to a point (of course not now, but for instance in a year) when a temporary return here would be advisable. Why? For instance I could become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen by that time, which is one of the things I might desire then and be able to attain.

You will agree with me that the Hague is a very peculiar place. It is in fact the centre of the world of art in Holland, and at the same time the surroundings are very varied and beautiful, so that one can always work there. And so—though certainly not for the present, in let us say a year, there will perhaps be ground for a longer or shorter stay here. And by this arrangement about the furniture, I remain in touch with somebody who knows me, and who, as soon as I ask it, can help me to a house. So I am a free man, without ballast, and I can leave when I want. And with your fr. 150 I can do more now than when there were so many demands on me. And by being for once a little more free from cares that were getting too much for me, I am in a more hopeful mood.

In this way, the expenses for the journey are greatly simplified. The only drawback, shadow, or whatever you may call it, is that I myself expected some change for the better for the woman, from the stay in Drenthe, and now I have misgivings. It is certainly her own behaviour that decided me to act like this, but if I had been able to find the means, I would have taken her with me to Drenthe, as a last effort to save her. Well, I had to decide, as each week's delay brought me deeper in the labyrinth, without helping her any further.

In case I should take my furniture, half a waggon to Drenthe will cost, according to a more detailed account from Van Gend & Loos, somewhat more than 25 guilders; fetching and delivery is extra, though that would not amount to so very much.

Besides I should need some cases, which I should have to buy, and that would be another expense.

It would have been convenient to have my things with me, but it is too expensive, especially if one does not stay in one place.

I should like first to have a look at Katwijk, to make a few marines, and because that is at all events within my reach, even if I should have to put off the journey to Drenthe because of the money.

O Theo, you will understand how I feel these days, a great melancholy about the woman and the children, but it could not be helped—at the same time all my thoughts concentrate on the work, and I feel a great energy, because now I can do things, that otherwise were impossible.

Dear brother—if you could know exactly my feelings, how I devoted part of myself to the woman, forgetting every other thing and concentrating myself on saving her—if you could feel exactly my melancholy view of life, which however does not make me indifferent to it, on the contrary, I prefer to feel my sorrow than to forget it or to become indifferent—if you could feel exactly, how I put my serenity “in worship of sorrow” and not in illusions, then perhaps, even for you, brother, my inmost soul would be different and more detached from life, than even you can imagine now. I shall certainly not speak much about the woman any more, but I shall continue to think of her very often. From the very beginning to help her has been a question of all or nothing. I could not give her money to live by herself, I *had* to take her in my house, if I wanted to be of any use to her. And in my opinion, the right thing would have been to marry her, and take her with me to Drenthe, but I admit, she herself as well as circumstances, make it impossible; she is not nice, she is not good, but neither am I, and just as we were, there was a serious affection, notwithstanding all. I must set to work, and hope to hear from you soon. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I add another little word—you ask me what I need; I have been thinking it over, and it is impossible for me to say what I strictly *need*; for that would not be little, so let us see what is in our reach, and make that do. Probably what is in our reach, will be below the work of what is “au fond” necessary, but in life it is already something to be able to carry out one’s plans in part. And I tell you that I will be satisfied with what you can spare. Life yonder is



cheaper, and I shall be able to economize more than here, and after a year, those economies alone will already have helped me on.

Once there, I can have colours sent by parcel post, so if *possible*, yes, then of course I supply myself beforehand, but if not, I do not put off the journey for that reason.

I hope that the last year will prove to have been sound after all, for I have not neglected my work, on the contrary, I have corrected a number of weak points. Of course there are more to be corrected, but these will get their turn now.

What I wrote to you in my last letter, that the woman had immediately broken certain promises, was bad enough, for she had tried to get a place as servant in an ill-famed house, to which her mother had set her on. The woman herself was soon very sorry for it, and has given it up, but it was very, very weak of her, to do it *just at that moment* ; but so she is—at least till now—she has not the strength to meet such a proposal with an absolute *no*.

Well, she forces me to take measures, which I had put off again and again. But on that occasion I saw in her, as it were a kind of crisis—I hope it has been thus far and no further. And it is a fact, that she herself considers our parting as a thing that may have good results. And because she is too much fatally connected with her mother, these two must go together, either the wrong way, or the right one.

The plan is now, that she will live with her mother, they will go out as charwomen in turn, and try to get a living in an honest way. That is their intention, and they have already found a few houses, and I have placed some advertisements, and they go out to look for places daily and begin to like it.

As long as it is necessary, I will go on to place advertisements, and do all those things which can be of use or help to them. And if I *can do so*, I will pay for them a few weeks' rent and a loaf a day before I go, to give them more time to carry out that plan well. But I did not *promise* them yet that I intend to pay these things for them, because I do not know whether I shall be able to do so. It will depend on circumstances.

And for her I decidedly advise a marriage of convenience with a widower for instance, but I tell her in that case she must be *better for him than she was for me*.

Write soon, will you?

Dear Theo,

My things are packed, and as soon as I have the money, I can leave here. It is best to act as quickly as possible, for in such a time of moving one cannot work, and I shall not feel at ease till I am settled somewhere in the country.

So if you can send some money about the 10th, I hope to be able to start, if not at once for Drenthe, I will go and stay for a few days in a village near by.

I hope it will turn out as you suppose, in fact so do I more or less, that it will cause in the woman a change for the better.

But I'm afraid it will not be so, and that she will fall back in the old ways. These last days I have seen it clearly, that her going out to look for a place was only a make-believe, and that she probably waits till I am gone to begin something they do not mention to me.

Reason the more for me to start at once, for otherwise it would end in her keeping things dangling on purpose. And that's again a trick of the mother. So I intend to start abruptly, and to let a few weeks pass by. Then I will write to them and see how things are.

I too begin to believe that I must go away, to make them realise the gravity of the position. But such an experiment is dangerous, in so short a time, they can spoil a great deal.

Why, oh why, is the woman so foolish?

She is entirely what Musset has called "Un enfant du siècle"—and I can't help thinking of the ruin of Musset himself when I think of her future. In Musset there was something noble and idealistic; well, in her too, there is a "je ne sais quoi," though she certainly is no artist.

*If she only were that a little.* She has her children, and if these become more than they are now, her chief interest there is some steadiness in her, but even that is not what it ought to be, though her motherlove, imperfect as it is, in my eyes is the best trait in her character.

I once heard there has been a relation between Musset and George Sand. George was resolute, positive, and hard-working, Musset was *lâche*, indifferent and neglected even his work.

Between those two characters it came to a crisis and a rupture. After that, a desperate effort of Musset, and remorse, but not before he had sunk even deeper in the mud, and in the meanwhile George Sand had arranged her affairs, was quite absorbed in a new work, and said: "it is too late, it cannot *be helped now*."

But these things bring so much soul's anguish, and make hearts shrink with pain, more than anybody suspects.

Theo, when I go, my mind will not be at rest about her, on the contrary, I am anxious, because I know that she will only awake when it is too late, and will only get an ardent desire for something simpler and purer, when the moment to attain it will be past.

When I see that sphinx-like look in her, I know it of old, in her as well as in others, and it is a bad sign.

And that melancholy look into the abyss is also fatal, and the way to avoid that is to work hard.

And, Theo, now—she drops her hands in her lap already too much—melancholy if it can be conquered, must be conquered by hard work, and he who does not feel that, is undone for ever, and goes straight to the dogs. I have told her so, often enough. At times she has taken it a little to heart.

But now you see, she is very near the brink.

It shall not be my hand that throws her in, but I *cannot* keep standing for ever near, and draw her back.

A man must have so much common sense, that when others help him and warn him, he must on his side exert himself.

Try to send me about the 10th, at least so much that I can leave here, for that would be wise.

But don't let it bring you into trouble yourself. I will act according to circumstances and will let you know at once what I have done. If it is not enough for Drenthe, I go for a few days to Loosduinen and wait there.

I found more beautiful things still in Loosduinen, old farm-yards—and in the evening there are some splendid effects there. Probably I would book my things through or check them.

But it is just now the moment that I can give up the house, and as soon as your letter arrives, I leave here; it will be a hint for the woman to put her shoulder to the wheel. I will place a few more advertisements, but these last two days they have done nothing but dawdle, and I'm afraid they have quite changed their plans.

Adieu, Theo, I wish things were fixed already, for days like these are hard and of little profit.

Have some luck and prosperity, believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

I hope you did not fall ill, I had the same thing some time ago, but it has disappeared again. Perhaps eggs are the best thing to restore the stomach, at least if weakness is the cause.

322

Dear Theo,

I just received your letter with enclosed fr. 100. And I start to-morrow for Hoogeveen in Drenthe. From there I go further, and from there I will write you my address.

So in no case write to the Hague any more.

And I would ask you to let C. M. know of my leaving here, because, as you say, he might write to me. If he has done so already, it would be best, perhaps, for him to ask for the letter back from the post office, because not knowing what my next address will be, I can only give it to the post or to my landlord later.

Friend Rappard has also started on his trip, has left Drenthe already, has almost reached Terschelling. He wrote to me from Drenthe "the country has a very serious character, the figures reminded me often of studies of yours. As to the living there, one can certainly nowhere live cheaper. And the south-east corner (the part which I described to you) I think the most original."

Theo, on leaving, I certainly have a very melancholy feeling, much more than would be the case if I were convinced that the woman would show energy, and if her good-will were not so doubtful.

Well, you know the principal facts now.

I for my part must push on, otherwise I should break down under it, without bringing her any further.

But the children of which I am so fond?

I could not do everything for them, but if only the woman had been willing. However I shall not bore you with it any longer,

for I must go on, "quand même." Now for prudence' sake, I could not risk taking a supply of colours with me, as I shall have to pay there, immediately for my luggage, when it arrives, and lodging and railway fare. But if we are lucky enough to get something from C. M., I shall have sent me by parcel post some things I have selected. The sooner this can be the better.

So if you hear anything, write to me as soon as you know my address and of course I agree to the proposed arrangement of sending only a part of the fr. 100 if you are hard up, wait for a more favourable moment.

I cannot help thinking that perhaps C. M. will do nothing at all.

At all events, brother, it was very energetic and wise of you to send this at once, for now I can go there already and look around a bit and even without help we can certainly manage there.

Therefore many thanks, and be sure it will prove to have been a good measure. My intention is to stay there, for instance, till you come next year to Holland. I should not like to miss your visit then. But in this way I should spend one of each season there, and get a general impression of the character of things in that part.

I have provided myself with a passport, valid for twelve months. With this I have the right to go where I want, and to stay in a place as long as or short a time as I like. I am very glad that I can hurry on now, for in this way we help ourselves. I reckon fr. 50 for board and lodging there, and the rest for the work, that's a great difference from what I could do here.

So if we have no help from others, we shall not sit still.

Good-bye, I have a lot to do still to-day—so please drop a line to C. M. I will soon send you my address, perhaps if all goes well to-morrow night.

Adieu, a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

You wrote me not long ago: "Perhaps your *duty* will make you act differently." That is a thing I have directly pondered over, and because my work so undoubtedly requires my going away, my opinion is that my work is my duty, more direct than even the



woman, and that the former may not suffer because of the latter. Last year it was different, *now* I am *just* ready for Drenthe, but one's feelings are divided and one would like to do both things, which *is not possible* under the circumstances, because of the money, and more than that, because she is unreliable.

## DRENTHE

SEPTEMBER—NOVEMBER, 1883

323

Dear Theo,

Hoogeveen Tuesday evening.

I have just arrived here.

From the train I saw some beautiful bits of the Veluwe, but about the time we arrived in these parts, everything was dark. So I do not know much about it as yet. I am sitting in a large inn-parlour, like those in Brabant, where a woman sits peeling potatoes, rather a pretty little figure.

I have been talking to the people here, and one of these days I will sail by barge down the whole Hoogeveen canal, through the peat fields, straight across the south-eastern corner of Drenthe.

From here to the north, there seems to be a beautiful heath right up to Assen. You can imagine I am rather curious to see it all.

At the Hague everything came off well. That land surveyor came to say good-bye at the station.

Of course the woman and her children were with me to the last, and when I left, the parting was not very easy.

I have provided her with all kind of things as well as I could, but she will have a hard time.

I have taken but very little colour with me, but yet some, and I hope soon to begin the attack. The colour of the Veluwe was rich.

I shall wait here for your next letter. I am staying at a village inn, quite near the station.

The address is: A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper, Hoogeveen.

Afterwards I will perhaps go deeper into the heart of the country, but I must wait till I have some provision of colours.

I will soon write more, for the moment I have seen nothing but

what I tell you, the scene through the carriage window and the bar-room here which is nothing particular.

I only want to tell you I am here.

Good-bye, to-morrow I am going out on discovery. A handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

When you receive this, be so kind to mail a postcard at once in order to see whether it reaches me all right. I got up very early this morning, because I was rather curious. The weather was splendid, the air is clear and bracing as in Brabant. At the inn here, I saw a stable fitted up differently from those in Brabant. Perhaps I will make something of it someday, at least if I stay here.

Well, the country around here is for the greater part meadow-land, with here and there little trees. I think I did well by taking Hoogetveen for my starting-point.

At least it is rather curious that I hear, already the very first evening, how with those barges I can sail down the whole peat district, as far as the Prussian border and the Blacklake. I will soon write you more about it than I can to-day. As soon as I have more colours, I will begin that excursion and will go from one village to another.

But my address remains here, and I will leave my things here even if I am absent for some time, and do not know exactly where I shall be.

I have arranged to pay a guilder a day when I am here, and while absent I can leave my trunk, etc., in the garret. In the village harbour I saw very typical peat barges, and figures of bargemen's wives dressed as they are here in the hayfield—very picturesque.

Farther down in the country it will be more beautiful still; but for the present I see very good things even here.

So write soon a few words to the address of A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper at Hoogetveen.

The village or little town is just a long row of houses along the harbour, many new houses, and a few more beautiful old ones.

Dear Theo,

Now that I have been here a few days, and have strolled about in different directions, I can tell you more about the neighbourhood where I have taken up my quarters. I enclose a little scratch of my first painted study in these parts: a cottage on the heath. A cottage made only of sods and sticks. I saw also the interior of about six of that kind, and more studies of them will follow.

How the outside of them appears in the twilight, or just after sunset, I cannot express more directly than by reminding you of a certain picture by Jules Dupré, which I think belongs to Mesdag, with two cottages, the moss-grown roofs of which stand out very deep in tone against a hazy, dusky evening sky.

*So it is here.* Inside those cottages, dark as a cave, it is very beautiful. In drawings of certain English artists who worked in Ireland on the moors I find shown most realistically what I observe here.

Alb. Neuhuys gives the same, but a little more poetically than at first strikes the eye, but he never makes a thing that is not true at bottom.

I saw splendid figures out of doors—striking by an expression of soberness. A woman's breast, for instance, has that heaving movement which is quite the opposite of voluptuousness, and sometimes, when the creature is old or sickly, arouses pity or respect. And the melancholy which things in general have here is of a healthy kind, like in the drawings by Millet. Fortunately the men here wear short breeches, which show off the shape of the leg, and make the movements more expressive.

In order to give you an idea of one of the many things which gave me new sensations and feelings on my excursions, I will tell you, for instance, that one sees here peat barges in the *very middle of the heath*, drawn by men, women, children, white or black horses, just as in Holland, for instance, on the Ryswyk tow-path.

The heath is splendid. I saw sheepfolds and shepherds more beautiful than those in Brabant.

The kilns are more or less like that on Th. Rousseau's "Four Communa." They stand in the gardens under old apple trees or

between cabbages and celery. In many places there are beehives too. One can see on many faces that they are not in good health; it is not exactly healthy here, I believe; perhaps because of foul drinking water. I have seen a few girls of seventeen, or younger still, perhaps, who look very beautiful and youthful, but generally they are very soon faded. But that does not interfere with the great noble aspect of the figures of some, who, seen from near by, are already very faded.

In the village there are four or five canals to Meppel, to Dedemsvaart, to Coevorden, to Hollandsch Veld.

If one sails down them one sees here and there a curious old mill, farmyard, wharf, or lock, and always bustle of peat barges.

To give you an idea of the typicalness of these parts—while I was painting that cottage, two sheep and a goat came to browse *on the roof* of this house. The goat climbed on the top, and looked in at the chimney. Hearing something on the roof, the woman rushed out, and threw her broom at the said goat, which jumped down like a chamois.

The two hamlets on the heath where I have been, and where this incident took place, are called Sanddrift and Blacksheep. I have been in several other places too, and now you can imagine the originality here, as after all Hoogeveen is a town, and yet quite near-by there are already shepherds, those kilns, those peat huts, etc.

I often think with melancholy of the woman and the children, if they were only provided for; oh, it is the woman's own fault, one might say, and it would be true, but I am afraid her misfortunes will prove greater than her fault. That her character is spoilt I knew from the beginning, but I hoped she would improve, and now that I do not see her any more, and ponder over some things I saw in her, it seems to me more and more that she was too far gone for improvement.

And that just makes my feeling of pity the greater, and it becomes a melancholy feeling, because it is not in my power to redress it.

Theo, when I meet on the heath such a poor woman with a child on her arm, or at her breast, my eyes get moist. It reminds me of her, her weakness; her untidiness, too, contributes to make the likeness stronger.

*I know that she is not good*, that I have the fullest right to act as I do, that I *could not* stay with her yonder, that I really could not



take her with me, that what I did was even sensible and wise, whatever you like, but, for all that, it pierces right through me when I see such a poor little figure feverish and miserable, and it makes my heart melt within me. How much sadness there is in life, nevertheless one must not become melancholy, and one must seek distraction in other things, and the right thing is to work; but there are moments when one only finds rest in the conviction: "misfortune will not spare me either."

Adieu, write soon. Believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

325

Dear Theo,

Your letter just arrives so I know that the mail reaches me regularly.

Some days ago I wrote you a line to tell you a few things about the country around here. Everything is beautiful here, wherever one may go. The heath is much more extensive than that in Brabant, at least near Zundert or Etten, a little monotonous in the afternoon, and especially when the sun shines, but I would not miss that very effect which I tried in vain to paint a few times. Neither is the sea always picturesque; but those moments and effects, too, must be studied if one does not want to be deceived in their real character. Then, at that hot midday hour, the heath is far from attractive sometimes—it is aggravating, monotonous, and fatiguing like the desert, as inhospitable and hostile, as it were. To paint it in that blazing light, and to render the vanishing of the planes in the infinite, is a thing that makes one dizzy.

However, one must not suppose it must be taken sentimentally, on the contrary, that is what it hardly ever is. That same aggravating, monotonous spot—in the evening when a poor little figure moves through the twilight—when that extensive sun-scorched earth crust stands out darkly against the delicate lilac hues of the evening sky, and the very last little dark blue line at the horizon separates earth from sky—it can be as sublime as a Jules Dupré. And the figures, the men and the women, they have that very same

characteristic, they are not always interesting, but when one looks at them with patience, one discovers absolutely the Millet-like side.

Yesterday I found one of the most curious cemeteries I ever saw. Imagine a patch of heath, with a hedge of thick grown little pine trees around, so that one would think it just an ordinary little pine wood. There is an entrance however, a short avenue, and then one sees a number of graves grown with grass and heather. Many of them marked with white posts bearing the names.

I send you a sketch of it from the study which I painted. I am making another study of a red sun between the little birches on a marshy meadow, from which the white evening damp rises, over which one just sees at the horizon a bluish grey line of trees with a few roofs.

It is a pity you have not heard anything yet of C. M.

Of course he *need* not do anything, but I think it rather rude never to send a word of reply.

But you must understand one thing—I see more and more that we are living in a time in which things have got rather mixed up, (I for my part don't think it *rather* but enormously mixed up, but I will not force that opinion on you). As to C. M., he as well as many others would be very polite towards a stranger, but “on ne hait que ses amis.” And as he has quite absorbed himself in the ebb and flood of trade, and art business, he is so engrossed by very abstract things, that a very natural thing, for instance, that I have spoken to him and still speak to him about my affairs, strikes him as disagreeable as an open door that gives a draught, for his thoughts are far, far away—always—and he knows no better than to free himself rather roughly, just as one shuts the draughty door with a bang.

You will say that I suppose him to be very little delicate, well, that is exactly what I do suppose, though I do not doubt that he *can* be very pleasant, but only when he has his attention fixed to the matter, which, in my case, certainly is *not* so, the more so, because he seems to have certain fixed opinions about me which I do not think I must try to change.

I hope to send you soon studies from here, when I shall have got some together, and just think it over, if some of them would perhaps be the thing for Wisselingh.

My money is almost gone, and strictly speaking I had hoped to be able to lay in a little supply of colours and other materials, but well—we must cut out our coat according to our cloth—though it is a pity there is not a little more of the cloth. But by working on patiently things may be mended. I am very glad though that I am here, for, lad, it is very beautiful.

I am longing to hear more from you. Perhaps I understand some things a little, but, above all, I know and trust you have acted well.

As for acting well, our circumstances sometimes make us different from what we should be if we were not thwarted in our intentions.

I, for my part, would rather have stayed with the woman, though it would have been doubly difficult, but as far as I could see it was impossible under the circumstances.

And if I constantly see her in my imagination as a phantom, it is not as a reproachful one, but I am melancholy that I did not have the means to act towards her as I would have wished to do. Times are hard, and you will have your share of it. When I came here, I had with me a number of half used up tubes and a few new ones, just sufficient for about six studies, but certainly no more. So with the next money I will at once have some sent, enough for a few studies again.

For the rest, I am drawing, but you know all about it, that painting must be the principal thing, as much as possible. I do not know how I shall manage to get the money changed here. If it could not be done here, I might get it changed at Assen, but if you could arrange it so that, say, twice—till I know my way about here better, and shall have found a bank at Assen, where I have not been as yet—if twice you could send me Dutch money, or a postal order, for instance, that would be a good thing, otherwise I might not know how to manage.

I hope you will be able to send no later than 20th September, for as soon as I arrived here I paid a week in advance, so another will be due, and I shall have to pay again.

At the back of the page you will find a sketch of the little churchyard. The colouring there is very peculiar.

It is very beautiful to see the real heather on the graves. Theodour of turpentine has something mystical about it, the dark stretch of

pine wood which borders it separates a sparkling sky from the rugged earth which has in general a ruddy hue—fawn—brownish, yellowish, but everywhere with lilac tones.

It was not easy to paint. I will try some more effects of it, with snow, for instance, it must be very curious.

I had heard something already about Liebermann, but your description especially of his technique gives me a better idea about him. His colour must be *infinitely* better than that of Henkes' (you express it very well "slate colour dissolving into greyish yellow and greyish brown"). I understand it perfectly well. *That way of*



painting is a delightful thing if one knows it well. And the reason why I want to paint much, is just because I should like to have in my technique a certain firmness and system (though I have heard many people say you must not have a system).

But he and several others do have it. From your description I see that he, Liebermann, must work rather in the manner of Herkomer. Especially in carrying through systematically and analysing those patches of light and shadow, caused by sunbeams through the leaves, which dazzle many an eye.

The other day I saw the large engraving after Herkomer "The Last Muster." I suppose you have seen it too—what a manly

thing! I should love to see the "Fille d'un Mineur" by Jules Breton. At Courrières there is still a coal mine. When I came there on a rainy day, the miners were just going home through the mud, like a caravan of chimney-sweeps; I remember one with an old capote, but the women, at least those I saw, did not wear men's clothes like they do in the Borinage, where the "loques de fosse" are the same for everybody.

Well, lad, your letter will be very welcome again. If you have not done so already; write a little word to C. M. to tell him that I am now *alone* here in Drenthe, and mention something about my plans. But if he does not answer, I think I must give it up.

Thanks for all the trouble you took.

It is beautiful grey weather this morning, no sun for the first time since I am here, but for all that, it will be just as fine, so I am going to set out. The people where I board are excellent; the man works at the depot, the fellow has something de Groux-like about him: a face that has sometimes the colour of red cabbage, a real coolie. The woman very active and neat, three children. Probably they will give me a back garret for a studio. Good-bye, brother, best wishes, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

You know the address is: A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper, Hoogeveen.

326

Dear brother,

I just received your letter, many thanks for it.

I will again tell you a few of my experiences here. In the first place, I had a letter from Rappard from West-Terschelling and he is very hard at work there, having been first here in Drenthe at Rolde in the neighbourhood of Assen. I hope to go and see him there this winter, and make a few studies; unless it will be difficult to cross to Terschelling; as far as I can make out, the journey there and back will cost about three guilders.

But it is certainly worth as much to be again with a painter, and it will break my solitude.



I long very much for your next letter, which I hope will come soon. Do not forget to tell me the result with C. M. whether you have told him I was here, and if that letter also remained unanswered.

If so, I shall most certainly go and call on C. M. some day, of course not now, to ask him for an explanation why he did not answer. I will not write to him, but I am firmly resolved not to put up with his not answering, especially not answering *you*, and added to that, also his not answering *me*.

I have never pretended that he was obliged to do something, nor do I do so now. What he did or might do I count as a favour, for which I have always thanked him, and for my part have given him studies for it, at least fifty in all, with the right to change them afterwards.

But this being so, I certainly need not bear insults, and it is a decided insult that he did not give me notice of having received the last parcel of studies. Not a syllable.

Listen well, brother, understand this once and for all, however desirable it may be to get some financial help—this is far from being the principal thing. The principal thing is that he goes too far, in losing from sight my rights as a human being. Even if I were a stranger to him (I never mention family relationship, I never count on that) I could not bear to be treated as a bad person, to be judged or accused of things without being heard myself. I have the right, *the full right*, to *demand* an answer, and in case of his remaining silent, I must take it as a gross insult.

So I kindly beg you simply to tell me the result of your letter, then I shall know for myself what I have to do. I will not say another word about it, but even if more than a year might pass over it, I will keep within me just as untarnished, clear and bright as at this moment, the same conviction that *I must have* an explanation, and I will not rest before I have settled this matter with him in some way or other.

I believe you will approve of this feeling, all the more so, if you knew exactly what happened in former years between him and me, when I was very sceptical about the plan of studying,<sup>1</sup> whether the promise to carry it through was sincere and well considered. I

<sup>1</sup> Vincent refers here to his studying theology. See Vol. I., Letters from Amsterdam,

then thought they had made the plan rashly, and I had approved of it rashly, and in my opinion it always remains an excellent thing there was a stop put to it then, what I brought about on purpose and arranged so that the shame of giving it up fell on me, and on nobody else. You understand that I who have learned other languages, might have managed to master that miserable little bit of Latin which I declared, however, to be too much for me. This was a fake, because then I would rather not explain to my protectors that the whole university, the theological faculty at least, is, in my eyes, an inexpressible bungle, a breeding place of pharisaism.

That I did not lack courage, I tried to prove by going to the Borinage, where certainly my life was much harder than it would have been as a student.

I thought that C. M., for instance, would have understood me better, and I have reason the more to consider him little delicate, when I think how, since then, he has treated me with a certain suspicion. Yet his conscience must tell him that neither then nor now have I ever committed any base action towards him, so that this insult of not answering has no reasonable excuse.

For this mysterious, sphinx-like silence I have the deepest contempt, and hereby I declare to you, I find it everything but straight and honest or true. It may be like the general politics of the present day, I know that very well, but you know that I don't agree with the general politics of the present day, because I consider them mean and carrying all the signs of decadence which lead to a real period of retrogradation! One might almost weep over what is spoiled at present, on every side; that to which our predecessors gave their honest labour is now cowardly, neglected and abandoned. The time in which we live is perhaps outwardly a little more respectable than the one that is past, but the nobleness disappears too much, so that one no longer expects from the future the same great things which have been in the past. Well, everybody must find his own way. Now to change the subject (but it was necessary to treat this matter, though I do not in the least like to write about it) I come back to my experiences here.

The more I walk around here the better I like Hooγεveen, and I do not doubt that it will remain so.

Even without the help of C. M., and I am afraid it will be so, it will be in the long run cheaper here than at the Hague. But

without the help of C. M., I shall have to stint myself for a certain time before I can carry out my plans. And perhaps, after all, nothing will be lost by it.

But the fact is that I need money, and a supply of colours and different things, before I can expect any good results from an excursion through the south-east corner of Drenthe.

But in six months, for instance, I hope to have saved as much, and in the meanwhile I will be able to make some things here. So for the present I will not go further, but stay and work here in the neighbourhood. I will try to save some money for two trips, one to the south-east district, one through the moors between here and Assen. And with the latter excursion northward, I hope to combine the visit to friend Rappard, and to stay some time at Terschelling at his inn called "The Shiplet."

To undertake these two excursions would be too reckless if one did it without provision and without the necessary precautions. But with patience they will be possible, for I see clearly enough that I have less expenses here than at the Hague. And before undertaking them, I want to pay back the money to Rappard, though it may be that afterwards I will borrow some from him again, after having seen him, and when I shall know for sure that it will help me to make a certain thing.

At first I had some bad luck here with my models on the heath; they laughed at me, and made fun of me, and I could not finish some studies of the figure I had started through the ill-will of the models, notwithstanding I had paid them well, at least for here.

However, I did not give it up, and on that same spot I concentrated myself on one single family, from which I can now have an old woman, a girl, and a man, and I hope they will remain willing. I have made a few studies of the heath which I will send you when they are dry, and I have also started a few water-colours. And I began some pen drawings too, just with a view to painting, because with the pen one can enter into such details as are impossible for painted studies, and it is advisable to make two studies, one solely drawn for the composition and one painted for the colour. That is to say, if it is possible and circumstances permit it, this is the way to carry through the painted studies.

The heath is splendid, and there are marshy meadows that often remind me of Th. Rousseau.

Well, I can tell you that the country air and life here do me much good. Oh, if only the poor woman might have enjoyed it too. I think of her with such tender regret—though my common sense clearly tells me that it is impossible under given circumstances.

I am anxious about her, because I have not heard anything, and must conclude from it that either she did not want to do, or was not able to do the things I advised her. I can even hardly write to her, because as long as she continues to live in the Bagijnestraat, in the first place I know that my letter will probably be opened by her brother or her mother, and in the second place, as long as she lives there, I do not *want* to have anything to do with them, *not even with her*. Well, perhaps I may still hear, but if not, it will give me a melancholy feeling. I had hoped to have tidings from another address than the Bagijnestraat that she would have started a small laundry with her mother.

Oh, Theo, if she had had no family, she would have behaved so much better. Women of her kind are certainly bad, but in the first place they are infinitely, oh, infinitely more to be pitied than condemned, and in the second place, they have a certain passion, a certain warmth which is so really human that the virtuous people might take an example from them, and I for my part understand the words of Jesus when He said to the superficially civilized, the respectable people of His time, “The harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.”

Women like her, they can be thoroughly bad (I do not speak here of the Nanas, hot blooded and voluptuous, but of the more nervous, reflective temperaments among them) women like her quite justify the saying of Proudhon: “La femme est la désolation du juste”; they do not care at all for what we call reason, and they act straightway and wickedly against it. I know that, but, on the other hand, they have that real human feeling so that one cannot but like them and cannot but spare them, and it makes one feel there is some good in them, a something very good even though one cannot define it otherwise than as “je ne sais quoi, qui fait qu’on les aime après tout.”

Gavarni was quite in earnest when he said: “avec chacune que j’ai quittée, j’ai senti quelque chose se mourir en moi.” And the most beautiful word and the *best* I know about women, is that which

you also know: "O femme que j'aurais aimée," and one would enter eternity with it—without wanting to know any more about it than that. I know that there are women absurd enough to be entirely governed by ambition (they do more harm with it even than men). Lady Macbeth is the type of such; these women are dangerous, and, notwithstanding their charm, one must avoid them, or one becomes a scoundrel, and in a short time finds oneself face to face with terrible evil one has committed and can never repair. But that was not the case with her with whom I was, though she was vain as we all are at times; poor, poor, poor creature is the only thing I felt at the beginning, and still feel at the end. Bad? *que soit?* but who is there that is good in these times? What man feels himself so pure that he can act as a judge? Far from it. Delacroix would have understood her, I say, and God's mercy will understand her still better I sometimes think.

As I told you, the little chap was very fond of me, and when I was already in the train I had him still on my lap, and so we parted I think on both sides with inexpressible sadness, but not more than that.

I tell you, brother, I am not good from a clergyman's point of view. I know full well that, frankly speaking, prostitutes are bad, but I feel something human in them which makes me feel not the least scruple to associate with them; I see nothing very wrong in them. I have not the least regret about any intercourse I may have or may have had with them. If our society were a pure and well regulated one, yes, then they would be seductresses, but now, in my opinion, one may often consider them more as sisters of charity.

And *now*, as in other periods of the decline of civilization, the corruption of society has turned upside down all relations of good and evil, and one falls back logically on the old saying: "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

Like you, I have been on "Père la Chaise." I have seen there graves of marble, for which I have an indescribable respect. I feel the same respect beside the humble tombstone of Béranger's mistress, which I looked for on purpose (if I remember well it is in a corner behind his own), and there I remembered also especially Corot's mistress. Quiet muses these women were, and in the emotion of those gentle masters, in the intimacy, the pathos of their poetry, I always feel everywhere the influence of a woman's



element. I speak rather seriously in this letter, not because I think father's feelings and opinion wrong in everything—far from it; in many things you will do well by following father's advice, but I just want to point out that father and many others *do not know*, that besides their own righteous lives—for father's life is righteous—there are other righteous lives in a milder spirit, of the type Corot, Béranger, for instance. You and I also, at all events, feel that much more. Because father and others *do not know that*, they are often and fatally mistaken in their judgment of certain things, mistakes of the kind that, for instance, C. M. makes, who feels sure that de Groux is a bad man, in which, however sure he may think himself, he is mistaken.

I will tell you another thing now, to prove to you that I do not speak in abstractions, but about things that have foundation and substance.

Do you want an example of somebody who possesses by origin the common good Dutch character and sentiment, and yet has modified that sentiment since, yet has thought better of it, and I think will modify it still more? Then I mention as an example Rappard, who now is already much more gentle and humane than when I first became acquainted with him, and, in my opinion, has greatly improved, though he was good already, but I am afraid that not everybody will consider it so, and that he has been in conflict about it already. It is true he was good already, but yet he became dissatisfied with *that*, and is now deeper and more humane than he was. It has not made his life easier—he used to have less inward struggle—I am sure of that, for I used to call him jokingly “*The tranquil conscience*” and teased him about it, what I no longer do at all now, because I see a revolution has taken place in him. He is a *little less* elegant, and he is much less superficial as a man, and a certain genial germ has begun to develop, and he has avoided the cliff of “narrow-mindedness.”

Concerning people who honestly seek for the best, I think it so true what Hugo says: *il y a le rayon noir et il y a le rayon blanc*. In my opinion, father has more the *rayon noir* and Corot has more the *rayon blanc* but both have a *rayon d'en haut*.

As to Millet, he is above all others the man who has this white light. Millet brings a gospel, and I ask you, is there not a difference between a drawing of his and a good sermon? The sermon

becomes black by the comparison, even supposing the sermon to be good in itself. I know that you too have a hard struggle these days, though I do not know exactly how or what it is. At all events it is from sympathy that I tell you exactly what I think about some things, because I, too, have had a hard struggle, and have it still.

And to you I do wish more and more this white light. Thanks for what you send me, and a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

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(Postcard.)

Dear Theo,

(Hoogeveen Sept. 24th '83.)

To-day I send you by parcel post three studies which I hope are dry enough; however, if they stick to the sheet of paper which I put on them for precaution, sponge them off with tepid water. The smallest one especially is very much tarnished. In a week or so brush it over with the white of an egg, or in a month, with a little varnish, to restore the colour. I send them to you to give you an idea of the work, which will be better hereafter you know. I forgot to give an answer to what you wrote about sending the money, for the present I beg you to send it by post order as last time, till I have found an exchange office; but deduct the expenses.

I had a letter from home. Father had been unwell in consequence of a fall. I hope it is not more serious than they wrote to me—do you know anything more about it?

Last week I was deeper in the peat fields—splendid scenery. I think it more and more beautiful here, and from the very beginning, I will contrive to stay in this neighbourhood. For it is so beautiful here that it will require still much more study to render it, and only very elaborate work can give an exact idea of the things as they are at bottom, in their serious, sober character. I have seen superb figures, but I repeat, a scenery that has so much nobility, so much dignity and gravity, must be treated with deep forethought and patience and steady work. Therefore, I must from the very beginning not consider it as if I came here just to have a

glimpse of things, but if everything goes well, and if we may have some luck, it is a matter of course that I shall stay here for good. Do write soon again. I long to hear from you, for, notwithstanding the beautiful scenery, I feel gloomy. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Remember me to Wisselingh when you meet him, and tell him I am here.

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Dear brother,

As I feel a need to speak out frankly, I cannot hide from you that I am overcome by a feeling of great care, depression, a "je ne sais quoi" of discouragement and despair more than I can tell. And if I cannot find comfort for it, it overwhelms me too strongly.

I take it so much to heart that I do not get on better with people in general; it quite worries me, because on it depends so much of my success in carrying out my work.

Besides, the fate of the woman and the fate of my little poor little chap and the other child, cut me to the heart. I should like to help them still, and I cannot. I am at a point where I should need some credit, some confidence and warmth, and, look here, I find no confidence. You are an exception, but just because everything falls on you, it makes me feel still more how hopeless everything is.

And if I look at my things, everything is too miserable, too insufficient, too dilapidated. We have gloomy rainy days here, and when I come to the corner of the garret where I have settled down, it is curiously melancholy there; through one single glass pane the light falls on an empty colour-box, on a bundle of brushes, the hair of which is quite worn down, in short, it is so curiously melancholy that luckily it has also a comical aspect, enough not to make one cry over it but to take it gaily. For all that, it is very disproportionate to my plans, is very disproportionate to the seriousness of my work—so here is an end to gaiety. What can I say? Last year ended with a still greater deficit than I told you, for I have paid off already more than I told you of, *including Rappard*, but

there is a new debt to Rappard, however, and that weighs upon me most, because he is a friend, and though for the moment I have paid off everything that was in the least urgent, I stand for the fact that I cannot buy colours because I have still to pay for the old ones, or, rather, I dare not take anything on credit, because after some time that would again run up a high bill. You know yourself how during your visit we were not exactly in a mood to say more, but now I declare to you that the Hague has been too much for me, and that I had put off the parting again and again, because of one fixed reason, though the deficit was unavoidable if I persisted.

Because rather than part from her I would by marrying her and going to live in the country have risked another effort, not however without telling you how things were. But I felt sure that this was the straight way, even notwithstanding temporary financial objections, and not only might it have saved her but it would for me have put an end to great soul's anguish which now unluckily has been doubled. And I would rather have emptied the chalice to its dregs. If either father or you had perhaps been able to feel it so, I do not say I should have been made happier or unhappier by it, and if the parts had been reversed, you in my place, I in yours, I do not know whether I should have been able to act differently than you have done, but I repeat, perhaps it might have saved her. So I consider it as something, the decision of which did not depend on you both, but on myself (except that I cannot give myself my father's permission to marry), and so I *have* decided, for the very reason that I was already in debt, and that the future was dark—but this decision brings little relief, and does not take away the exhaustion brought about by a year of too much care, while there also remain a bleeding heart and a feeling of void and disappointment and melancholy not easily to be cured.

It is true I am here now, and as to the finances, I have almost covered the deficit, and after some time will have covered it quite, and nature is beautiful here, more so than I expected.

But I am far from being well settled and at ease, for the glimpse I gave you of my little garret is taken from nature.

If I had known everything beforehand, I ought to have gone to these parts last year with the woman when she left the hospital, then there would have been no deficit, and then we would not have parted, for she is less guilty in her bad behaviour than her family,

who have used all kind of mean intrigues, partly for her benefit, but at bottom against her. Besides, I have sometimes doubted if, for instance, the mother were not backed by a priest, for, from their side, more has been done to influence the woman than I can explain, the more so, because I have not heard anything from her, though I told her before I left that I would send my address to the carpenter next door as soon as I should know it myself. I did send it him, begging him to give it her, yet I have not heard anything, but only from that same carpenter, that she came to take away all her things (after all, more than she brought in). Now you can understand that I am anxious about her fate, though I believe if she were simply in need, she would have written, but now there must be something wrong at the bottom of it. You will understand how I feel about it. I am rather afraid that her family tells her, he will certainly write and then—he is under our thumb, in short, they speculate then on my weakness and I will *not* walk into that trap.

So to-day I wrote not to her, but to the carpenter, that he must see to it that she gets my address, but I will *not* write first to her, and *if* she writes, I shall see how things really are. So much I can tell, however, I am not yet so far that I can resign myself to the idea of separation, as yet I am much, much worried about her fate, just because she leaves me in the dark about it. And besides, I am overwhelmed the last few days by gloomy feelings about the future, and also about the miserable state of my provision of painting materials, the impossibility to do the most necessary, useful things, as they ought to be done. Because from the very first, it proves to be so beautiful here, I would, if I could afford it, send for my things from the Hague, and I would arrange this very same garret for a studio (by making a little more light) or I would hunt up some other room. And then I should like to replenish and renew all my materials.

I wish I could do that thoroughly for once, and if somebody would help me to do that, my greatest cares would be relieved. But now, either everything falls on you or I find nobody who trusts me; that is the circle in which my thoughts turn round, and I see no way out. A painter who has no means of his own, he cannot do without rather large credit, a credit which not only the painter's profession demands, but which I think the shoemaker's, carpenter's and blacksmith's profession would demand just as well, if they wanted to establish themselves, or had to move to a new place.



It is this rainy weather especially, which we still have to expect to continue for months, that handicaps me so much.

And then, what shall I say—sometimes my thoughts run in this way: I have worked and economized, and yet I have not been able to avoid falling in debt; I have been faithful to the woman, and yet I had to leave her; I have hated intrigues, and yet I have neither credit nor money at all. I do not think lightly of your faithful help, on the contrary, but I rather ask myself if I must not tell you: “leave me to my fate, there is no help for it; it is too much for one person, and there is no chance of getting help from any other side. Is that not proof enough that we must give it up?”

Oh, lad, I am so melancholy—I am in a splendid country, I want to work, I absolutely need it—at the same time, I am absolutely at a loss how to surmount the difficulties, when I think that all my things are in a most miserable condition, and that I am here without a studio or anything, and shall be handicapped on all sides till I can mend matters.

The models refuse to pose when there are other people around, and that is the chief reason why a studio is necessary.

I have now the very same feeling I had when I started a studio in the Hague: “if I do not do it now, I shall never manage.” And about the Hague, I am not sorry I acted then as I did; I only wish that I had come here one year and a-half sooner, and had started a studio here instead of yonder.

Father wrote to ask if he could help me, but I have kept my cares to myself, and I hope that you, too, will not speak to father about it. Father has his own cares, and if he were to know that I was not getting on well, it would worry him still more. So I write to father only that I liked the place here exceedingly, which is absolutely true as far as the scenery goes. As long as the weather was fine I did not mind the troubles, because I saw so many beautiful things, but now that it has been pouring all the time these last days, I see more clearly how I have got stuck here, and how handicapped I am. What can I do? Will it get better or worse in time? I do not know, but I cannot shake off a feeling of deep melancholy.

In every life some rain *must* fall  
And days be dark and dreary.

That is true and it cannot be otherwise, but the question is, is not the number of dark and dreary days sometimes too great?

All the same, I had models again in the barn, but with very difficult light. Well, I do not refuse to do anything that can be done, *but can I do what is necessary under the circumstances?* And this letter is a cry for more breath, and if the winter had to be as it has been these last days, I should be badly off. It is beautiful, yes very beautiful with the rain, but how can one work, how can one when so many things are lacking? Good-bye, lad, I wish everything would come all right, but we ought to find more sympathy from others, otherwise I am afraid it won't. I hope to hear from you soon. *Did you receive the studies?* With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

This morning the weather was better again, so I set out to paint. But it was impossible, four or five colours were lacking, and I came home so miserable. I am sorry to have risked myself so far without a sufficient supply. I know by experience beforehand how it ends when one undertakes such an expedition, without knowing that one will get an answer to, and that people will listen to, reasonable, rational demands.

You remember, perhaps, how it was with me in the Borinage. Well, I am rather afraid it would be the same thing here all over again with me, and I must have some security before I risk myself further, otherwise I will go back (Oh, you know, I just say so, but I really want to stay). I did not see any good at the time, nor do I now, in coming to such a point of destitution, of having actually no roof over my head, of having to wander and wander for ever like a tramp, without finding anywhere either rest or food or covering, besides, without any possibility of working.

Look for yourself on the map, how far it is from Mons to Courrières. I went that way on foot, from Valenciennes to Mons and back, with not quite two francs in my pocket—three days and three nights, at the beginning of March, in wind and rain, without a roof over my head.

It is just these antecedents, brother, to which I have not yet come of course—but should come if I risked myself too far without security, if I did not put my affairs in reasonable order. I repeat, if I risked myself far in the country without anybody to back me up.

Before I begin—I do not distrust or suspect you, but it is just a measure of common sense—I repeat, before I begin (and I ask it because not very long ago you wrote to me about being worried yourself, and being afraid of troubles and calamities in the future) can you assure me that the usual remittance will not be lacking? And at the same time—though that may be sufficient, and I should not need more under certain circumstances—the condition on which the usual money loan can be sufficient, I will tell it you, it is to begin well equipped, to start with a provision of certain things. I, who like to take the initiative to act, because sometimes a proof of sincerity is needed, a fact proving that one does not deal with words but with actions, though I went as far as Drenthe, I shrink back not from taking the first step, but from taking the next, without being sure of my footing.

Experience forces me to a definite fixed arrangement. If you had gone through what I suffered during that expedition in the Borinage, you would in my case have learnt exactly the same as I did—what I see so distinctly and clearly now—*recognising* as old acquaintances all the circumstances and things with which I have to deal.

The expeditions I should want to make are impossible and foolish to be undertaken without supplies. They are very precarious without a surplus of ready money for unforeseen circumstances.

In short, one must not undertake them without the thorough conviction that one will be frustrated everywhere and always, by people who stand staring at one, but do not put out a hand to help. One must expect to be distrusted at every inn—like any poor pedlar (for that is what they take one for). Often one has to pay the money for board and lodging in advance—as I have to do here—to get them to take one in for pity's sake. And so everything is *prose*, everything is *calculation* as regards a plan for an excursion, that, after all, has poetry for its end. I never told it you as plainly as I do now, and if I do so now, *I assure* you it is not in the least because I distrust you, but because since I planned this journey, I have not

spoken to you as seriously as I do now about the obstacles in connection with the money you might have available, or might be able to find for it. I must speak about it now, because, though in one of my last letters I told you that everything here was better than I expected—which really remains the case—yet I find in this inn drawbacks as to light, space, opportunity to work with a model, and therefore—though, if need be, I can put up with it, and will do so if it *must* be—I am thinking of pushing on farther into the country, notwithstanding the bad season, not doubting that wherever I go I shall find at least just as good an opportunity to work as here, and I hope even more space, etc. It is now about two weeks that I have been here, and I speak from experience when I tell you that in many, almost in all respects, my materials and outfit and provision prove to be insufficient.

Hoogeveen itself is classed as a town on the map, where it is marked with a red dot, but it is not so in reality (it has not even a tower). So I cannot get anything in the way of drawing materials. If I go deeper into the country, I shall be still more handicapped and must be prepared for everything, or, I repeat, it would be sheer madness. I would not hurry so if the far advanced season did not urge me to the greatest speed. Remember that time is passing, and before I can have an answer from you perhaps again two weeks will have gone by. Before the real winter comes (and it will be there but all too soon!! I really do not see how to manage), I should like to try to get some better quarters—still farther away on the heath. And also my state of mind which is too gloomy, for which I feel an urgent need to be able to go on working steadily, this being the very best remedy and distraction—forces me to insist on better equipment.

And that would remain exactly the same, even in case I stayed here.

I am bargaining about two lots of old tubes, that are only outwardly damaged a little, one of Leurs, the other of Furnée, that is the father of that land surveyor, and besides I should need brushes, canvas, water-colours and Whatman.

If I told you it can wait, I should be telling an untruth, for it is absolutely necessary that it happens at once.

If it cannot be, it cannot—but then I must stop my work.

And I should not have grown so melancholy even now if my

bad equipment had not handicapped me too much. If in some respects I could find encouragement and the strictly necessary, I think I could manage all right here. The country is very beautiful—to-day I saw a funeral in a barge, that was very curious—six women wrapped in coats in the boat that was pulled by the men along the canal through the heath, the clergyman in a three-cornered hat and breeches, exactly like a figure by Meissonier, followed on the other side; there are all kinds of curious things here. You must not be angry with me for writing like I do. I came here in too great a hurry, and only now I feel what I lack, and that I acted rather rashly—but what else could I do? Without the distraction of my work I feel unutterably melancholy as you will understand, and I *must* work and work hard, *I must forget myself in my work*, otherwise it will knock me down. I repeat, I do not distrust you in the least, but my experience forbids me to undertake an excursion without knowing on what I can count. So speak *absolutely openly*, for my decision depends on it, and, at all events, I will suit myself to circumstances. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

If I had known beforehand that I should have to part from the woman after all, I would probably have parted six months ago—but even though I still have to smart for it, I am glad I was faithful to her rather too long than too short a time, and I did not want to act on my own responsibility before I had spoken to you personally. When you think of last year, do not forget that the reason of the too high expenses was less our personal needs than the enormous prices at the Hague. Had I known everything—I would have economized two hundred guilders on rent, even if I had taken *this whole inn with garden and all*, and lo! out of one single item, the whole deficit would have been supplied. Indeed, the woman is quite innocent of my deficit, and so am I, in so far as at the Hague it was impossible to act differently—but if I had known it, I would have moved hither much sooner. I reproach myself with this blunder, or rather this ignorance. But after all, last year has not been fruitless or useless—it has been a year of hard work, and after all, I look back on it with calmness. As to my not having my hands as free as I should wish at present—in no case shall I have them free,



even if assistance came ; for by then a great part of the autumn will have passed already—and before the winter I shall only have finished a part of those studies, which I had hoped to get done. As to momentary difficulties, only patience will clear them up here—all the same, I should like to undertake another trip between now and Christmas. Let us make the most of our time, for loss of time is the most expensive. I have at the Hague more than 70 painted studies—if I had made them here they would have been of more use to me.

I must tell you frankly, that of late I have been sorry, and am so still, I paid off my debt with the money you sent. It is true I was in debt, but none of those I recently paid exactly pressed me now—though sometime ago they did, and I might still have put it off. I do not know whether one may not think of oneself first, in order to keep one's hands and one's energy free, for I repeat, before the winter I shall not be able to get the necessary studies painted, and who will thank me for it.

I shall reproach myself with it, and be miserable about it. I paid Leurs, just now since your visit, over 30 guilders, it is true. I might get credit if it were ordinary colours, but I am bargaining for old tubes, which I can get with  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent discount, but in cash. It is the same thing with Furnée, that is the father of that land surveyor. I have his assurance that he trusts me, but the fact is, that I generally used to pay him in ready money—and see no reason to change it, as then I should seem to change my line of action, and it might influence our friendship, and what I wanted to take from him is also a part of that same lot, about half of it, so it is again a question of cash. Then brushes, another paint-box, a portfolio for studies, and other things—if I buy them for cash I get more favourable conditions, and shall have no further worries about it, and if I have no further worries, I can begin to settle with Rappard.

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Dear Theo,

(N. Amsterdam.)

This once I write to you from the very remotest part of Drenthe, where I came after an endless long sail on the barge through the

moors. I see no chance of describing the country as it ought to be done; words fail me for that, but imagine the banks of the canal as miles and miles of Michel's or Th. Rousseau's, van Goyen's or Ph. de Koninck's.

Level planes or strips of different colour, getting narrower and narrower as they approach the horizon. Accentuated here and there by a turf shed or small farm, or a couple of meagre birches, poplars, oaks—heaps of peat everywhere, and one constantly sails past barges with peat or bulrushes from the marshes. Here and there lean cows, delicate of colour, often sheep—pigs. The figures which now and then appear on the plain are generally of impressive character; sometimes they have an exquisite charm. I drew, for instance, a woman in the barge with crape on her cap, because she was in mourning, and afterwards a mother with a baby; the latter had a purple shawl over her head. There are a lot of Ostade types among them: physiognomies which remind one of pigs or crows, but now and then a little figure that is like the lily among thorns.

Well, I am very pleased with this excursion, for I am full of what I have seen. This evening the heath was inexpressibly beautiful. In one of the Boetzel Albums there is a Daubigny, which exactly gives that effect. The sky was of an indescribably delicate lilac white, no fleecy clouds, for it was more compact and covered all the sky, but dashes of more or less tony lilac, grey, white, a single rent through which the blue gleamed. Then at the horizon, a glittering red streak, under which the very dark stretch of brown moor, and standing out against the red glimmering streak, a number of low-roofed little huts. In the evening this moor often shows effects which the English call “weird” and “quaint.” Don Quixote-like mills, or curious huge bulks of drawbridges, stand out in fantastic silhouettes against the vibrating evening sky. Such a village in the evening, with reflections of lighted windows in the water, or in the mud and puddles, looks sometimes very snug.

Before I started from Hoogeveen, I painted a few studies there, among others, a large moss-roofed farm. For I had had paint sent from Furnée, as I thought about it like you wrote in your letter, that by absorbing myself in my work, and quite losing myself in it, my mood would change, and it has already greatly improved.

But at times—like those moments when you think of going to America—I think of enlisting for the Indies, but those are miserable, gloomy moments, when one is overwhelmed by things, and I could wish you might see those silent moors, which I see here from the window, for such a thing calms down, and inspires to more faith, resignation, steady work. In the barge I drew several studies, but I stayed a while here to paint some. I am quite near Zweeloo, where, among others, Liebermann has been, and besides, here is still a part where you find large, very old turf huts, that have not even a partition between the stable and the living room. I intend first of all to visit that part one of these days.

But what tranquillity, what expanse, what calmness in this landscape, one feels it only when there are miles and miles of Michel's between oneself and the ordinary world. I cannot give you a permanent address as yet, as I do not exactly know where I shall be the next few days, but 12th October *I shall be at Hoogeveen*, and if you send your letter at the usual time *to the same address*, I shall find it there, on the 12th, at Hoogeveen.

The place where I am now is New Amsterdam.

Father sent me a postal order of ten guilders, which, together with the money from you, makes me able to paint a little now.

I intend to settle for a long time at the inn where I am now, if I can easily reach from there that district with the large old turf huts, as I should have better light and more space there. As to that picture you mention, by that Englishman, with the lean cat and the small coffin, though he got in that dark room his first inspiration, he will hardly have been able to paint in that same spot, for if one works in too dark a room, the work usually becomes too light, so that when one brings it to the light, all the shadows are too weak. I just had that experience when I painted in the barn an open door and a glimpse in the little garden.

Well, what I wanted to say, is that there will be a chance of removing that obstacle too, for here I can get a room with good light, that can be heated in winter. Well, lad, if you do not think any more about America, nor I of Harderwijk<sup>1</sup> I hope things will arrange themselves.

I admit your explanation of C. M.'s silence may be right, but sometimes one can be careless purposely. At the back of the

<sup>1</sup> Place where Volunteers enlist.

page you will find a few scratches. I write in haste, it is already late.

How I wish we could walk here together, and paint together. I think the country would charm and convince you. Adieu, I hope you are well and are having some luck. During this excursion I have thought of you continually. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

N. Amsterdam.

Having nosed around this place for some days, I am writing to you again. It is here so absolutely and entirely what I think beautiful, that means, there is peace here.

There are other things I think beautiful—for instance, the drama—but that, it is everywhere, and there are not *only* effects of van Goyen here. Yesterday I drew some decayed oak roots, so-called bog trunks (that is, oak trees which have perhaps been buried for a century under the bog, from which new peat has been formed; when digging it up, these bog trunks come to light).

These roots were lying in a pool, in black mud.

Some black ones were lying in the water in which they were reflected, some bleached ones were lying on the black earth. A little white path ran past it, behind that more peat, pitch-black. And a stormy sky over it all. That pool in the mud with those rotten roots, it was absolutely melancholy and dramatic, just like Ruysdael, just like Jules Dupré.

Here follows a scratch from the peat fields.







There are very often curious contrasts of black and white here. For instance a canal with white sandy banks, across a pitch-black plain. In the above sketch you see it too, black figures against a white sky, and in the foreground again a variation of black and white in the sand.

I saw an effect exactly like Ruysdael's bleachfields of Overveen, in the foreground a high road overshadowed by clouds, then a low barren meadow, on which the light fell, and down below two houses (one with a slated roof, the other with red tiles). Behind it a canal and mounds of peat, varying in size according to the plain on which they stand, far away a silhouette of a small row of huts, and a little church spire, little black figures spreading linen out to bleach, a single mast of a barge rising between the mounds of peat. A grey stormy sky over all. I often think of van Goyen on these misty mornings, the cottages are just like this, that same peaceful and naïve aspect.

I think I have found my little kingdom you know.

"Coming events cast their shadows before," is an English proverb.

I must once more repeat, that I hope you feel perfectly sure, in hours of melancholy, that you are not without a friend? For I think I can assure you that you can trust me. Why do I repeat this—because I have been thinking over what you wrote about America. And I cannot approve of that "*plan quand même*," even in case you may have the finest connections there, for instance, with Knoedler or whoever you like. Though it is only perhaps in a melancholy moment that the thought crosses your mind, though it is not exactly a plan, I do not believe it is so, yet it proves that you have your gloomy moments. And I can perfectly well understand it—though I know nothing of the circumstances, but quite in general, that it is not very pleasant at Goupil's. Wisselingh told me the story of the firm in London, and I can only say this, that there is certainly an enormous difference between the house of Goupil & Co. as it *was* (for instance, when uncle Vincent was still a partner, and not even *his* last years) and *now*.

For persons like you, this must be very unpleasant, everything so much more disagreeable than in former years.

Personal activity, personal energy, Tersteeg has got it, you have got it, and at the same time you have a position, but in case of a *change* it might not be of any use to you, and you would hurt your-

self everywhere against "triomphe de la médiocrité, de la nullité, de l'absurdité." If you have personal energy, do not let it wear out, do not let it rust, if things get tangled, and one cannot rely on anything, try something more simple then. But I am so out of everything, I know so little directly about it—I think the few words I heard from Wisselingh about London, are the only things I heard about business in one year and a-half, so I may be quite mistaken.

But some things seem so queer to me, that in general, I suppose business to be out of joint, though I do not know exactly where and how it became so.

Now you will say perhaps, yes, but your painter's business is still more wretched, unsolid, and there, too, it may happen that personal energy or activity cannot do everything, for instance, provide one with food for some time. All right, admitting this to be true, but if it is a case of providing for the simplest needs, it will not make things worse, if one tried a place where life is cheaper instead of the very expensive city life. If I might have just a little luck, if I might find a few friends for my work—then, yes, then I would speak quite differently still.

For the very reason that I owe to you my having been able to work on till now, I want to tell you, that I do not doubt for a moment, you would consider it a delightful thing to have a handicraft, and though it might bring you at first in the most impossible and queer relations with your real position, as to life in general, the glimpse of the future would give you a "qu'est-ce que ça me fait"—a future which, though it does not entirely depend on personal activity, yet has more direct connection with it than business that is no handicraft.

In the beginning you would not have to be alone, and I assure you that *shortens* enormously the time of ineptitude. It is a fatal thing, that sometimes one has to plod for a whole year on a thing that might have been explained in two weeks by somebody more advanced. It does depend on personal effort, but the road is easier or more difficult according to one's being alone or not. And the worst thing is, when *one has absolutely to know* a thing, and on asking it, has the other turn his back on you.

That is a beastly thing, but it does happen, and perhaps people call that good manners. One is absolutely beaten then, and it is so

painful to know beforehand that one is sure to make a number of mistakes before finding it out oneself, all which loss of time and misery are costs which might have been spared.

The result is that one never asks again, and only depends on oneself, but it ought not to be so. Well, there are many things that ought "not to be so." Enough of it, I only say *if ever* you change (though there may be no question of it as yet), become a painter then.

And then spend your early days together with me, though I do not know as much as many others, and though I am still ignorant on many points. I shall be able to speak much, much more decidedly about it, if I can succeed in getting some more stability in my affairs this year. When C. M. comes, talk it over with him. I do wish that through relations with him things would become a little easier especially for you.

A thing that would help you a good deal, is that you come fresh from the world of art, from which I had been excluded a long time, when I began.

For it is necessary to feel well the link between nature and pictures in general. I have had to renew that in myself. I hope to make something of the women on the moor of enclosed little scratch, and I am going to the same field.

Adieu, lad, but you must not think any more about going to America.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

And you must not think "I am no artist," for in as far as universal feelings of energy and intellect are needed, be assured you possess them.

As I told you, I shall be at Hoogeveen 12th October, but after that I shall come back here.

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Dear Theo,

N. Amsterdam.

I just received your letter. I read it over and over again with the greatest interest, and a thing becomes clear to me, which I had often thought of without being able to make it out.

That is to say, you have in common with me, a time of drawing stealthily the most impossible mills, etc., which drawings stand in curious relation to the throng of thoughts and aspirations—useless because nobody who might lend a helping hand takes any notice (only painters could show the right way then, but they have their thoughts elsewhere). That is a great inward struggle, which ends in discouragement, or in the giving up the ideas as impracticable, and just at the age of about twenty one is very eager to do so.

What I may have said then, which involuntarily contributed to that casting overboard of things, at that moment my thoughts were perhaps the same as yours, that is to say, I regarded it as something impossible, but as to that despairing struggle without getting light anywhere, I know it too, how awful it is—with all one's energy one cannot do anything, and thinks oneself crazy, or Heaven knows what. How often in London did I stand drawing on the Thames Embankment, when I went home in the evening from Southampton Street, and it came to nothing. If then there had been somebody to tell me what perspective was, how much misery would have been spared to me, how much further should I be now. Well, let bygones be bygones. It has not been so. I have spoken once or twice to Thys Maris. I dared not speak to Boughton, because I felt such great awe in his presence, but I did not find it there either, that help with the very *first* things, the A B C.

Let me repeat now that I believe in you as an artist, and that you may become so still, aye, that in a very short time you would think it over in all calmness whether you are so or not, whether you would succeed in producing something or not, if you learnt to spell the above-mentioned A B C, and if at the same time you wandered through the cornfields and the moors, to renew that which you yourself express as “I used to feel myself a part of nature, now I do not feel so any longer.”

Let me tell you, brother, that I myself experienced so deeply, so very deeply what you say there. That I have had a time of nervous, arid over-straining, when there were days that I could not see anything in the most beautiful landscape, just because I did not feel myself a part of it. It is the street, and the office, and the care, and the nerves, that make it so.

Do not be angry with me now, when I say that your soul is sick at this moment, it is true, you know; it is not right that you do not

feel yourself a part of nature, and I think the most important thing is, that you must restore that. I must look into my own past to find why I lived for years in that stony, arid mood, and why though I tried to remedy it, it became worse instead of better.

Not only did I feel hardened instead of sensitive towards nature, but, much worse still, I felt exactly the same towards people.

They said I was out of my mind, but I knew myself that it was not true, for the very reason that I felt deep in myself my own disease, and tried to remedy it. I spent myself in hopeless efforts without any success, it is true, but because of that fixed idea of reaching again a normal standpoint, I never mistook my own desperate doings, worrying and drudging for my innermost self. At least I always felt "let me do something, be somewhere, it *must* redress itself. I will rise above it, let me have patience to redress things." I have often thought them over, those years of grubbing, but I do not see how in those circumstances I *could* have been different from what I was.

Think what ground gave way under my feet; think if such ground gives way, how miserable it must make one, whoever it may be. I had been six years at Goupil's. I was rooted there, and I thought that if I left them I could look back on six years of clean work, and that if I presented myself elsewhere, I might with full assurance refer to my past.

By no means so, things are done so hurriedly that there is but little time for reflection, for questions or arguments. People act according to very arbitrary, very superficial impressions, and once one has left G. & Co., nobody remembers who G. & Co. is. It is a name like X & Co., without any meaning, so one is simply "somebody out of employment." At once suddenly, fatally, everywhere, that is how it is. Of course, just because one possesses a certain discretion, one does not say, I am Mr. So-and-so, I am this or that. One applies for a new position in full earnest, without many words, fully intending to put one's hand to the plough. All right, but a person out of employment "l'homme de quelque part" becomes by and by suspicious. Now imagine your new boss to be a man whose business is rather mysterious, imagine him to have but one aim "money." Can you, with all your energy, at once on the spot help him to a big amount? Perhaps not. But he wants



money, money “quand même”; you want to know a little more about the business, and what you see or hear is rather disgusting.

“A person out of employment”—“I do not want you any longer” soon is the reply.

Well, look here, you become more and more “a person without employment.” You may go to England, you may go to America, it does not matter, everywhere you are like an uprooted tree. G. & Co., where you are rooted since your earliest years, G. & Co., though indirectly they brought you to grief, because as a boy, you thought them the finest, the best, the biggest in the world; G. & Co.—*if* you came back to them (I have not done so, I *could* not do it, my heart was too full, much too full)—G. & Co. would turn a cold shoulder on you, a “nous n’avons plus à nous en occuper.” For all that, one is uprooted, and the world reverses it and says that you have uprooted yourself. The fact is—your place no longer knows you. I felt too melancholy to try to redress things, and I do not remember ever having been in a mood to speak about it to anybody as I now do to you. Because, to my surprise, I read in your letter the words: “the gentlemen made things almost impossible when I spoke to them this week,” and I never for a moment had supposed they would dare to treat you as they did me. My dear lad, you know how things are with me, but if you are miserable about one thing and another, don’t feel *alone*. It is *too much* to bear *alone*, and in part, at least, I can sympathize with you. Now, keep to your point, and do not let your grief upset you; if the gentlemen behave like that, stand then on your honour, and do not accept your dismissal except on conditions which guarantee your getting a new situation.

Don’t make yourself angry, they are not worth that, *though they put you on to it*. I flew into a passion and walked off.

Now my position was again different from yours. I was one of the last, you one of the first, yet what I say about being uprooted, I am afraid you would feel it too, if you were out of it, so look that fact coolly in the face, don’t give in, and do not let yourself be turned out, without being somewhat prepared for the difficult situation of having to begin anew.

And know this well, in case of being uprooted, in case of a failure in beginning anew, do not despair. Suppose there was somewhere a whirlpool, with sharp-edged, rocky promontories, well, then I

would just think one might sail by them, might not one?—You will perhaps admit that rock to be there, as you yourself pulled me out of that whirlpool, when I myself had no longer any hope of getting out, and was helpless to struggle against it any longer.

I mean, sail by that whirlpool at a great distance—it begins to draw you in so far that you are estranged from nature. Do you think me foolish for daring to say: change in so far your course already *now*, so as to try to restore the harmony between yourself and nature? The longer you remain in this mood, the more you foster nervousness, your constant enemy and mine. I have more experience than you of what tricks it *might* play on you. Say: “Oh, no, not that way, please.” Look for a new aim, an interest in something, for instance, think that at bottom perspective must after all be the simplest of all things, and *chiaroscuro*\* a simple not a complicated thing. It must be something that speaks for itself, otherwise I do not care much for it. Try in this way to get back to nature.

Well, you simply believe this of me, lad, that at the moment I write this, I have got back something of the same feeling of years ago. That I again take pleasure in mills, for instance, that especially here in Drenthe, I feel very much as I did at the time when first I began to see the beauty in art. You will agree with me, in calling that a normal mood, won't you, to admire the things of nature, to be calm enough to draw them, to paint them.

What I further see is this:

That at this moment our mutual position is straight; to keep it so, a closer solidarity between us is desirable, and in my opinion, there are in ourselves a few things which we must settle between us.

I should wish that we both understood, that circumstances urgently command that Brabant be no longer closed against me. I myself think it best *not* to go there, if it can be avoided, but, in case of a calamity, as father has a house there that costs no rent, I might save the rent I am obliged to pay here.

I am at the point, that probably soon my work will yield *some* profit. And now if we could reduce the expenses to a minimum even below the present rate, I could perhaps earn a little instead of spending, become positive instead of negative.

If it is urgent that we *must* earn money, I see a chance of it in that way, if at home they have patience, if they realize what is

necessary, and especially if the whole family helps in the question of standing for the model.

In the question of models, they decidedly would have to do what I want, they would have to trust that I had my reasons for it. If I said to them: you must pose, they ought to do so. Of course I would not ask anything unreasonable.

You remember the reason why I left home, at bottom, a misunderstanding of each other in almost *everything*.

*Can one live together in such a case? Yes, for a time, if it must be, and if one feels on both sides, that everything must be subordinated to what the force majeure of circumstances demands. I wish that had been understood at the time, besides, I did not take the initiative of going away; but when I was told to go, I went.*

Well, I just mention this, because I see that perhaps circumstances will demand that you *must have* your hands free, and if my living at home for a time might further that, I think father and I must agree to it at once. Though, if it is not absolutely necessary—"tant mieux"—but I do not say that I absolutely *must* be in Drenthe, it doesn't matter in the least where I am.

So be assured in that respect, I would do everything you would think advisable.

But redress, *try* to redress if it does not go at once, the relation between you and nature and people. And if that can be done in no other way than by your becoming a painter, well, do so then, notwithstanding all objections and obstacles. I say, do write soon, be sure you do so, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

I send you the enclosed sketches, to give you an idea of the many varying things this apparently monotonous country presents. You see I just grasp here and there, I catch hold of one thing and another; things will afterwards arrange themselves and settle of their own accord. But I will not begin here with a prearranged plan; on the contrary, I want my plan to result from my studies. I do not know as yet the real character of the country, now I draw everything that presents itself, and then later on, after some experience, I will try and reproduce it in its real characteristics.

One thing depends so much on another, that one must catch

hold of everything, however much one should like to concentrate oneself, not a single thing can be left out.

So there is work enough. I have now a pretty large room (where a stove has been put), where there chances to be a small balcony, from which I can see the heath with the huts. In the distance I see a very curious drawbridge.

Downstairs there is the inn, and a farmer's kitchen with a peat fire on the hearth, very cosy in the evening. It is the best place for meditation near such a fireplace with a cradle beside it. When I feel melancholy or worried about something, I just run downstairs for a while.

I can tell you, that indirectly I heard something about the woman. I could not imagine why she did not write to me.

So I wrote to the carpenter next door, if the woman had not been to ask my address. And the scoundrel answers: "Oh yes, sir, but I thought you wouldn't like her to know your address, so I pretended not to know it." The wretch.

So I wrote at once to her, so it was not as good as the positive arrangement I had made with him and with her; but I do not want to hide myself *now* or *ever*, and I will rather write her at the address of her family than seem in any way to hide myself. That's my opinion about it. And I also sent her some money; that may have had consequences, but I can't help it. I *will not* act falsely. I found that scoundrel's letter at Hoogeveen, at my last visit there.

Friend Rappard has written to me again from Terschelling, and now to-day from Utrecht—he is home again. He has brought studies from there, especially of the almshouse. I don't understand it exactly, he told me the doctor had prescribed him sea air during the winter, besides, he longed to spend a winter in the country, but it seems to have turned out differently finally.

You wrote to me about Liebermann: his palette consists of slate-grey tones, principally running from brown to yellowish grey. I have never seen anything of his, but now that I see the landscape here, I can perfectly understand how logically he is led to it.

Often the colour of things reminds me of Michel; you know he too has a grey sky (slate coloured sometimes), a brown soil with yellowish greys. It is absolutely true, and according to nature.

There are effects of Jules Dupré, to be sure there are, but in

this autumn season, it is exactly that—which you describe about Liebermann. And if I may find what I seek—and why shouldn't I find it—I will certainly often do it in the same way, in that same gamut.

Mind you, to see it so, one must not look at the local colour by itself, but in connection with the colour of the sky!

That sky is grey—but so iridescent that even our pure white would not perhaps render *its* light and scintillation. Now, if one begins already by painting the sky grey, thus remaining far below the intensity of nature, how much more so must one transpose the browns and yellowish greys of the soil, in a lower key, in order to remain in keeping. I think if once one analyses it thus, it is so logical, one can hardly understand not to have seen it always so.

But it is the local colour of a green field, or ruddy brown heath, which, considered apart, easily leads one astray.

Write soon again, for your last letter was remarkably brief, too brief, but it was apparently written in the office.

What about that Tri-Annual Exhibition? There will be many beautiful things. I long to hear about it, because these certainly are the characteristic things of the present, and not of years past. So if you have a moment's leisure, tell me about it.

There is a rumour that Liebermann is somewhere here in the neighbourhood. I should like to meet him.

I must say I am very glad to have found a better place to work in, so that I needn't sit idle at home, now that there is so much rain, and bad weather is expected. I wish you could see the country here. In the evening it is inexpressibly beautiful.

And I think, with snow, it will also be splendid.

I read a very beautiful little book of Carlyle's: "Heroes and Hero-worship," nice sayings, as, for instance: we have the *duty* to be *brave*, though this is generally wrongly considered to be an exception. In life it is the same, goodness rises so high above everything, that of course we cannot reach to such a height. The most reasonable thing, and the thing that makes life less impossible, is to place our gamut in a lower key, and yet to try to be luminous, and not to fall into dullness.

One finds here the most wonderful types of Methodist clergymen, with pigs' heads and three-cornered hats. Also curious Jews, who look uncommonly ugly amidst Millet-like types or on



this naïve, desolate moor. But they are very typical. I travelled with a party of Jews who held theological discussions with some farmers. How is it possible such absurdities exist in a country like this. Why couldn't they look out of the window or smoke their pipes, or at least behave as reasonably as, for instance, their pigs, that make no disturbance whatever, though they are pigs, and are in their place in these surroundings and in harmony with them.

Well, I am off again for a walk, if you can spare a moment, write to me, and look out for something of Liebermann's at the exhibition.

Good-bye, my address is here for the present. Best wishes, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear brother,

My thoughts are always with you, no wonder that I write rather often.

Besides, my impressions have become more fixed, my thoughts are more collected, things adjust themselves, become more tangible. So I can write you about it in all calmness. In the first place, I don't see much probability of remaining on good terms with Goupil's. It is such an enormous business that it certainly will take a long time before one cannot put up with things any longer, before the corruption has penetrated *everywhere*. But, look here, —in my opinion there has been already a very long period of corruption, so I would not be at all astonished if it were far advanced.

But after all, it is not exactly about the condition of the business —about the negative of things—I want to speak; leaving all that aside, it is about one single positive matter I have something to say.

A few things have happened to you which I don't think unimportant. You have read in a different and better way than most people do the books of Zola—which I consider among the very best of the present time.

You once said to me "I am like that man in Pot bouille"; I said: "No. If you were like *that*, you would do well to enter a new business, but you are deeper than he, and I do not know

whether you are, in short, a man of business, actually at bottom I see in you the artist, the true artist."

You have had, unsought, deep harrowing soul's emotions; now things are running their course. Why? Whither? To a renewed beginning of a similar career? My decided opinion is—no—there is something deeper than that. Change you must—but it must be a general renewal, not a repetition of the same thing. You were not wrong in the past, no, in the past you had to be as you were; that past was right. Does there follow from it that it was *not* simply a preparation, a basis, nothing but a schooling, and not the definite thing as yet? Why should not that follow? In my opinion it is exactly all that.

I think things speak so much for themselves, that it would be impossible for me to tell you a thing that is not already quite evident, even to yourself. Besides, it strikes me as rather curious that there is a change in me too of late.

That just *now* I find myself in surroundings, which so entirely engross me, which so order, fix, regulate, renew, enlarge my thoughts, that I am quite wrapped up in them. And that I can write you, full of what those silent, desolate moors tell me. Just at this moment, I feel within me the beginning of a change for the better. It isn't there yet, but I see in my work, things—which I didn't have a little while ago. Painting comes easier to me. I am eager to try all kinds of things which I left undone till now. I know that circumstances happen to be so undecided, that it is far from certain I shall be able to remain here. Perhaps just because of your circumstances it might turn out differently. But I should be sorry for it, though I would take it quite calmly.

But I cannot help imagining the future, with not myself alone, but you and I, painters, and working together as comrades, here in this moorland.

That idea presents itself to me in all its attractiveness. The thing ought to happen without the least fuss, without much disturbance like "*une révolution qui est, puisqu'il faut qu'elle soit.*" That's all—so I only say that I would not be in the least astonished if, after some time, we were *here* together. I feel that it *may* happen, without making any more disturbance than a piece of peat rolling from one place to another. One moment, and it lies perfectly still again, and nobody takes the least notice of it.

But a human being has his roots, the transplanting is a painful thing, though the soil may be better in the place whither he is transplanted.

But is that soil better??? What the Puritans were of old, such are the painters in the present society.

It is no foolish, artificial piety or bigotry; it is something simple and solid. I am speaking now, more particularly of the Barbizon people, and that tendency to paint rural life. I see in you, as man, something that is in contradiction to Paris. I do not know how many years of Paris have passed over it—yes, a part of your heart is rooted therein—I admit it, but a something—a “*je ne sais quoi*”—is virgin still.

That's the artistic element. It is apparently weak now—but that new shoot buds, and it will bud quickly.

I am afraid the old trunk is split too much, and I say, bud in a quite new direction, otherwise I am afraid the trunk will prove to lack the necessary vitality. It seems so to me—do you think differently?

The more so, because, *if* you became a painter, you would unintentionally have laid the foundation for it yourself, and for the first time, you would have company, friendship, a certain footing. I also think it would bring directly a change in my own work, for what I lack are companionship and encouragement in my work, a certain interchange of opinions with somebody who knows what a picture is. I have been so long quite without it that I think I need that stimulus.

I have so many plans that I hardly dare to undertake them alone—you would soon enough make out what they are, what they mean. Though I wish it were not so, I am extremely sensitive as to what is said of my work, as to what impression I make personally. If I meet with distrust, if I stand alone, I feel a certain void which cripples my initiative. Now, you would be just the person to understand it—I don't want the least flattery, or that people should say I like it, if they did not; no, what I want is an intelligent sincerity, which is not vexed by failures. Which, if a thing fails six times, just when *I* began to lose courage, should say: now you must try again a seventh time. You see, that's the encouragement I need, and cannot do without. And I think you would understand it, and you would be an enormous help to me.

And it is a thing you would be able to do, especially then if you were obliged to do it. We should help each other, for I, for my part, would be the same to you, and that is of some importance. Two persons must believe in each other, and feel that it *can* be done and *must* be done, in that way they are enormously strong. They must keep up each other's courage. Well, I think you and I would understand each other.

I am not sure you could do it, if you were no painter. The only obstacle is the doubt, which people generally try to raise: Tersteeg, for instance, who is sceptical himself, who doesn't know what it is to believe.

Millet, however, is the type of a *believer*. He often used the expression "foi de charbonnier," and that expression is already a very old one. One must not be a City man, but a Country man, however civilized one may be. I cannot express it exactly. There must be a "je ne sais quoi" in a man, that keeps his mouth shut, and makes him active—a certain aloofness even when he speaks—I repeat, an inward silence, which leads to action. In that way one achieves great things, why, because one has a certain feeling of let happen what may. One works—what next? I do not know—

I will not hurry you, I only want to say: don't thwart nature. What I wish is not foolish, but I have a faint hope that one might begin it in a reasonable way, not absolutely without, but only with very little money, just what is needed for board and lodging. And as I do not want to cause an absolute calamity, but in case there is the smallest possibility, I say now:

"Follow that little point, that very slight possibility, there lies the road—follow it—drop all other things. I do not mean drop all outward relations; you must keep them if you can, but stick to your conviction in saying: *I will become a painter*; so that what Tom, Dick and Harry say, is like water on a duck's back."

I don't think you would then feel like a fish out of water, but that it would be like a coming home to your fatherland, that you would feel at once a great serenity—that you would feel more sure about becoming a painter than about a new situation, more sure of yourself even than at Goupil's.

How things would go for me, in case you did *not* decide to become a painter, I cannot tell. If there were a place for me in Paris, I should have to take it, of course, and otherwise, I should have to

compromise with father, that I could live at home, and work in Brabant for a time. But oh, I can tell you that I do not think much about it now for the moment. I think only of my work, and about that plan for you. You are a man with a will, and a good, intelligent, clear head, with an honest heart. I think you may safely become a painter if you can hold out for a time. And I repeat, it would be a decided stimulus for my work. To-day I have been walking behind the ploughers who were ploughing a potato field, with women trudging behind to pick up a few potatoes that were left.

This was quite a different field from the one I scratched yesterday for you, but it is a curious thing here, always exactly the same, and yet just enough variety, the same subjects like pictures of



artists who work in the same genre and yet are different. Oh, it is so curious here, and *so* quiet, *so* peaceful. I can find no other word for it, but peace. Say much about it, say little about it, it is all the same, it does not matter at all. It is a question of wanting an entirely new thing, of undertaking a kind of renovation of yourself, in all simplicity with the fixed idea: *ça ira*.

I don't mean to say that you will have no cares, things don't run so smoothly, but you must feel "I do what seems to me most simple—I have done with all that is not simple; I don't want the city any longer, I want the country; I don't want an office, I want to paint." That's it. But it must be treated as business, though it is deeper, aye, infinitely deeper, but every thought must decidedly be concentrated on it.

In the future you must look on yourself and me as painters.



There may be worries, there may be obstacles, yet *always consider us so—see your own work before you.* Look at a bit of nature and think: *I will paint that.* Give yourself up to the fixed idea: to become a painter.

All at once, people, even your best friends, become more or less like strangers. You are preoccupied by other things, exactly. All at once you feel, confound it, am I dreaming? I am on a wrong way, where is my studio, where is my brush? Thoughts like these are very deep; of course one says little or nothing about it, it would be a mistake to ask for advice about it, it wouldn't give you any light.

Now art dealers have certain prejudices, which I think possible



you have not shaken off yet, particularly the idea that painting is inborn—all right, inborn, but not so as is supposed; one must put out one's hands and *grasp* it—that grasping is a difficult thing—one must not wait till it reveals itself. There is something, but not at all what people pretend. Practice makes perfect: by painting, one becomes a painter. If one wants to become a painter, if one delights in it, if one feels what you feel, one can do it, but it is accompanied by trouble, care, disappointment, times of melancholy, of helplessness and all that, that's what I think of it. I think it all such a nuisance, that I just had to make a little scratch to forget it. Forgive me, I won't say anything more about it, it is not worth while.

To the world, we would have to show so much courage, so much energy, so much serenity, not take things too ponderously, you

know; in spite of serious cares, we would have to be merry, like those Swedes of whom you spoke, like the masters of Barbizon. We would have to take things literally, energetically, thoroughly, not doubting, dreaming or hesitating. This is a plan I should like, for no other plan could I care so much.

It is a great risk, but neither you nor I are afraid to venture something. Just think it over, and, at all events, write soon. Good-bye, lad, with a handshake in thought,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear parents,

(October 27th.)

I received your letter, many thanks.

The death of cousin A. touched me too. How suddenly things can happen.

I often thought she was not very happy, or rather, for my part, I do not doubt it for a single moment. I think one can hardly be happy as the wife of a banker, in the present time, least of all. You will say, that's not true—but my thoughts are pretty well fixed about those things.

There is a certain sphere which one had better avoid, in my opinion.

To change the subject, the people of het Heike cheated each other, and I cannot say for sure that it never happens here. But I think the people of het Heike, taken in general, proved to be at bottom very united, though they cheated each other eventually, and though this was considered quite a natural thing. I always found het Heike a remarkable example of energy, those little huts, each with a patch of ground, that poor little group struggling together against the barrenness of the heath—I do not deny their faults, but those are not the things that strike me in the first place. So here I had not yet thought about it, whether people cheated each other. Now that I think of it, I suppose it is so—probably it will happen now and then—but what strikes me in general is the same thing I saw on a small scale in het Heike. Here things are in general on a larger scale and more interesting, and they have more

character. It is something just as beautiful and well-ordered as an ant's nest or a beehive. That is how things are at large—for me they are admirable as they are—but now how might they be? They might be better, I don't contradict it—but I repeat, I see so much positive good here that I abstain from finding fault, especially as I am not at all able as yet to distinguish casualties from faults of character. Before I can decide that I must have seen more of it.

Now, when I compare the population of a city with the people here, I do not hesitate for a moment in saying that the population of the heath, the bog workers here, seem to me to be better. Yes, then the difference seems enormous, though they may cheat each other here, no less than at het Heike, but I do not say they do so, I do not know it as yet. Recently I had some conversation on the same subject with the man with whom I board, who is a farmer himself. It was by chance, because he asked me how things were in London; he had heard so much about it. I told him, in my opinion, a simple farmer, *who works, and works intelligently*, is *the* civilized man, that it has always been so, and always will remain so, that in the country one finds here and there an example of it, and in the city one finds among the very, very rare best people, a few men who are almost as noble, though quite in a different way. But that, in my opinion, it goes no further, and that in general there is more chance of finding a reasonable human being in the country than in the city. And that in my opinion the nearer one comes to the large cities, the farther one comes into the darkness of degeneration and stupidity and wickedness. He said, in fact, he was of the same opinion.

There *is* a difference, and in the country it is more quiet, more peaceful, a little better, too, though they may cheat each other, it is not so bad as in the city. By turns, we have here beautiful, clear autumn days and stormy ones.

I really like the latter best, though it is difficult to walk out of doors then, and sometimes even quite impossible. But what I find most practicable, is to go out all the same, and, taking a study one has made on a fine day, to paint it over according to what one sees out of doors in the rain. Don't worry about my health, I take care of myself, and even feel better here this first time than those last months at the Hague, when I suffered much from my nerves. And that is quite better now. I think there is no better place

for meditation than near a rustic hearth, and an old cradle with a baby, and through the window an outlook on a delicate green corn-field, and the waving of the alder bushes.

I am all the time studying the ploughers of late, and must be off again. Good-bye, dear parents; my overcoat is all right, the sweater is very comfortable, believe me,

Your loving,  
Vincent.

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Dear brother,

This morning I received your letter; in many respects the contents do not surprise me. It does surprise me a little that you should credit me with the least insight into business, as I am considered a dreamer in that respect, as you know, and I could not suppose that you thought differently about it. I think that idea of yours to change your situation is a very rational one. In the first place, one is not obliged to wait for the moment, when the employers will come to a better insight, and in the second place, if one considered oneself obliged to do so, one might wait for ever and ever, and a young employer might doubt, if, when that moment came, he would not be too tired out to redress things; how much more would this be the case for the old "pochards pleins" themselves. The latter will have quite lost their wits then; and decadence is decadence; a deserved ruin of a business; the fatal consequence of certain mistakes. I don't mean to say when it happens through thoughtlessness, but in case it happens through that odious, wanton, capricious, reckless way of outliving one's fame, and supposing everything to be a question of money, and that everything is allowed; it may succeed many a time, but the end is a breakdown, and such a managing director is the only man who gets off safely for the moment.

Well—it's the old, old story—but of course all those departments, officious as well as official, all that book-keeping, it's all nonsense, and *that's* not the way to do business. To do business is surely also an *action*, a measure of personal insight and energy. That does not count now—that is handicapped—thence your complaint: there are not pictures enough.

*Suffit*, in my opinion the house of G. & Co. is going in for speculation now, and who sows the storm must reap the whirlwind. I—who was with them for six years—who, though I was one of the lowest employees, even now after at least ten years, still feel how part of my heart is in it. I think it very, very sad. In Uncle Vincent's time they started with few employees, who were not treated nearly so arrogantly and as if they were machines. Then there was real co-operation, then one *could* be in it with all one's heart. But since then, the number of employees has increased, but it has consisted less and less of persons who really took things at heart and knew all about it.

I note with pleasure, that you don't mention the gentlemen in person; that is right, indeed, I didn't expect anything else from you. But for the rest, for you personally, it is indeed particularly difficult. Your heart is in it, and you are more faithful to them than any of the others. I think you would rather stay in it if possible, even in case another situation would be more advantageous, because the house is what it is. All that is counted for nothing, at least it seems so, for though, for instance, old Mr. Goupil felt a certain attachment to you, he would probably say nothing about it, because they themselves keep silent, and let things calmly accumulate.

But I must not lose myself in situations which I can only estimate quite in general.

Now I come to what you write about myself.

Of course I should like very much to spend some time in Paris, because I think I should find there that intercourse with artists which I shall need some day or other.

Is that possible? It would be so if it did not get you too much into trouble. I should like it well enough.

I should love to talk with you about what you wrote, but what would be the use? It is better to lend a helping hand when there is a chance. "N'importe comment."

For I should think that it would help me greatly in my work, if I had an opportunity to see more of printing, for instance. In painting I have had some years' practice now, so I stick to that. But if I could get some work in a printer's office or so, that would rather be a help than a hindrance—but I should have to learn all that. I think, however, I should be able to draw reproductions myself, for instance. And I am willing to try my hand at *anything* of that



kind, especially if a living is to be earned yonder in that way. I believe, indeed, that there will come a time for me when it will not be necessary to earn a living in any other way; but be sure that I shall not have the least objection to go to Paris, whenever you think it would be of any use, or necessary, for some reason or other.

*My* advising *you* in business would hardly be the thing. I am too long out of it, and if I came in it again, we would be of the same opinion in a great many things. And I do know I have seen what I have seen, and in matters of reproduction or publication I daresay I know what is good. And I am willing to lend a helping hand as to carrying things out, no matter in what way.

But I need not tell you that here on these beautiful moors I have not the least longing for Paris, and I wouldn't think about it at all if it had not been for your letter. And I simply say this: if it must be, all right, I will go to Paris; if it must be, all right, I will stay on the moors.

I will find everywhere things to paint. It is splendid here, and while painting, I think I learn to paint somewhat better. And *my heart is in it*, I need not tell you that.

Besides, I believe that after all, to know a handicraft is the most solid profession, one reason the more for me to stick to it.

But *if* it might happen that for some reason or other, on account of its being more convenient to you, or because of urgent necessity that we were together in Paris—I would daresay beforehand begin to draw, and I will give you light in the first beginnings.

I know how much I myself still have to learn, but yet I begin to see light, and in some way or other, by practice, or by learning from others what can be of use to me, I will stick to my painting with all my heart. And if it might be that you came to a point where you saw *light*, well, so much the better.

You say your heart is in the art business, all right, but still more in art itself, I believe.

Well, lad, write soon again—if you kept silent about it now I would imagine all kinds of worries. So if something is the matter write so, if nothing is the matter, write so, but don't keep it all to yourself, for that's not worth while.

Oh, I have had a letter from the poor woman; she was glad that I wrote to her, but she worries about the children, and she goes out

working as a charwoman. She is obliged to live with her mother Poor things.

But we must keep courage notwithstanding all.

I enclose a few scratches from here. The country is so beautiful that I cannot describe it. *If* I can paint a little better—then! You can arrange things for me exactly as you think best, I shall learn here, and I should learn yonder, too, I think. However things may go, I don't suppose it will make you more unhappy, and perhaps you have already put up with things too long. The best thing would be, if it turned out so, that you were more appreciated by your directors, and that they left you more liberty to do business as you should think best.

But leaving that apart, it seems to me that the whole art business is rotten—to tell you the truth, I doubt if those enormous prices, even for masterpieces, will remain. A “*je ne sais quoi*” has passed over it, which has chilled everything—and enthusiasm has been put to flight. Is this of great influence on the artists? Not at all, for the greatest of them generally profited personally but little from those enormous prices, in their last period, when they were already famous, and they—Millet and others, for instance Corot, would not have painted less, or less beautifully, without that enormous advance. And whatever may be said of art business, for the present it will remain so, that he who can make a thing worthy to be seen, will always find for it certain amateurs, who make it possible for him to earn a living.

I would rather have fr. 150 a month as a painter, than fr. 1500 a month in another position, even as an art dealer.

As a painter, I think one feels more a man among other men, than in a life that is founded on speculation, and in which one has to mind conventions. I wonder how it will all turn out, but it is all the same to me, one way or another. And as to you, I don't consider it would be such bad luck, if the consequences were that in your thirtieth year, you were a painter. I should consider it a great good fortune. With the thirtieth year one's real life begins, in fact, that's to say, its most active part.

Friends and family may consider you old, or I don't know what, but for all that, you can feel in yourself a renewal of energy.

But it is necessary then to reflect well, and to have a will, and to be wide-awake. But in that period, a change is really necessary;



they have closed their ears and eyes, because they *do not want to hear and do not want to see*. I think you and I are honest enough in any case, so that we need not be afraid to open our eyes to look at things as they are and present themselves. That little old saying means so much, expresses it all so exactly, that I cannot help thinking of it again and again.

This little scratch is of peat gatherers who were eating their lunch behind a mound of peat, with a fire in the foreground; the others are loading peat, but I am afraid the scratches are absolutely unintelligible.

These are two evening effects; I am still working on that burner of weeds, which I have in a painted study better than before, so



that it gives more the immensity of the plain, and the falling of twilight, the fire with a bit of smoke being the only spot of light. I went again and again in the evening to look at it, and on a muddy evening after the rain, I found this cottage, which seen on the spot, is splendid.

I repeat, I think that there are things for me to learn in Paris as well as here on the moors; in the city, I should have an opportunity to learn from other people, and to see what they are doing, and that is worth something; but working here, I think I should make progress, even without seeing other painters. And for my own pleasure, I would much rather stay here. But, if a change in your position would make it desirable for me to go yonder, perhaps to earn something in the same business, it is all right, and I have not the least objection.



Be sure to write me about all these things, which of course I do not mention to anybody else. If my affairs might change somewhat for the better, if I could count on C. M.'s buying my studies, for instance, then the best thing for me would be to stay here, as it is cheaper here, and if I had made some more progress, and you decided positively to become a painter, it would be an excellent place here for study—excellent.

Has C. M. been already? Once more, keep courage, I will try to do the same, and, if ever you decide to become a painter, do so with inward cheerfulness and all possible optimism. Then, taking a broad view of things, you would have to consider the time between now and your thirtieth year as a rather hard time of experiments, but at the end of it, you would find all things renewed, and a wide future before you. Think of what you told me at the time of those Swedish painters in Paris; one must have pluck, the more so, because one sees how everything is shaky and tottering. “Efforts de perdu, que soit”—but in times in which we live, they are our duty, and very often one has to choose between that and dreaming away one's time.

Well, lad, good luck, write soon again, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear brother,

It is Sunday to-day and you are not out of my thoughts. I should think it quite appropriate to apply to business the words: “plus tu y resteras plus ça t'embêtera,” and to painting: “plus ça t'amusera,” using “amusera” in a more serious sense of energy, cheerfulness, vitality.

Oh, I said, I should give Tom, Dick and Harry their due—by all means—let us do so, but having done justice to those things, are they not absurd, those forms and conventions, in fact, are they not really *bad*?

In order to keep up a certain rank, one is obliged to commit certain villainies, falsehoods—willingly and knowingly, pre-meditatedly. That's what I call the fatal side, even of the *rayon noir*, letting alone when there is no *rayon* at all.



Now take, for instance, the painters of Barbizon, not only do I understand them as men, but *everything*, the smallest, the most intimate details are sparkling with humour and life in my opinion. The "painter's family life" with its great and small miseries, with its calamities, its sorrows, and griefs, has this advantage of having a certain good will, a certain sincerity, a certain real human feeling. Just that *not* keeping up a certain standing, not even thinking about it.

Do I say this because I despise culture, just the contrary, because I consider and respect as civilization the real human feelings, life in harmony with nature, not against nature. I ask: what makes me the better man?

Zola says: "moi artiste, je veut vivre tout haut—*veut vivre*" without mental reservation—naïve as a child, no, not as a child, as an artist—with goodwill, however life presents itself, I shall find something in it, I will try my best on it. Now look at all those studied little manners, all that convention, how exceedingly conceited it really is, how absurd, a man who thinks he knows everything and that things go according to his idea, as if there were not in all things of life, a "je ne sais quoi" of great goodness, and also an element of evil, which we feel to be infinitely above us, infinitely greater, infinitely mightier than we are.

How wrong is the man at bottom, who doesn't feel himself small, who does not realize he is but an atom.

Is it a loss to drop some notions, impressed on us in childhood, that keeping up a certain rank, or certain conventions were the most important thing? I myself, whether I lose by it or not, I do not even think about it. I know only by experience that those conventions and ideas do not hold good, and often are fatally, decidedly wrong. I arrive at the conclusion that I do not know anything, but at the same time, that this life is such a mystery, that certainly the system of "conventionality" is too narrow. So that has lost its credit for me.

What shall I do now? The common phrase is "What is your aim, what are your aspirations?" Oh, I shall do as I think best—how? I can't say that beforehand—you who ask me that pretentious question, do you know what is your aim, what are your intentions?

Now they tell me: "you are unprincipled when you have no

aim, no aspirations"; my answer is: I didn't tell you I had *no* aim, *no* aspirations, I said it was conceited in the highest degree to try to force one to define what is indefinable. These are my thoughts about certain vital questions. All that arguing about it is one of the things of which I say "embêtera." Live—do something—that is more amusing, that is more positive.

In short—one must of course give Society its due, but must feel oneself absolutely free, believing not in one's own judgment, but in "reason"—(my judgment is human, reason is divine, but there is a link between the one and the other) and that my own conscience is the compass which shows me the way, although I know that it does not work quite accurately. . . .

It seems to me that you who are very young, do not act recklessly when you argue thus: I have enough of art business but not of art, I drop the business, and aim at the very heart of the profession.

That is what I ought to have done at the time. That I made a mistake, was an error in my point of view, perhaps natural, because then I did not know anything about teaching or about the Church—did not know anything about it, and cherished ideals about it.

You will say, doesn't one sometimes have ideals about art that are incompatible with existing conditions? Well, answer that question for yourself. I also answer it for myself by asking: is Barbizon, is the Dutch school of painters a fact or not?

Whatever may be said of the world of art, it is not rotten. On the contrary, it has improved and improved, and perhaps the summit has been reached already, but at all events, we are quite near it still, and as long as you and I live, though we might reach the age of a hundred, there will be a certain vitality of the real kind. So he who wants to paint—must put his shoulder to the wheel. If the woman came, of course she would have to paint too.

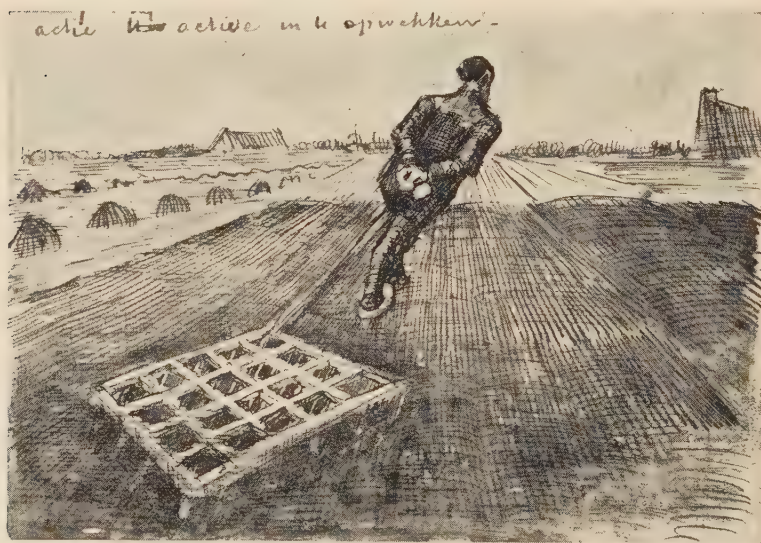
Everybody would have to paint here—the wife of one of the Van Eyck's also had to do so. And I must tell you that the people don't seem disagreeable or intriguing. There is a kind of benevolence in this place, and I think you can do exactly what you think best. There is an exceedingly youthful atmosphere in existence.

If you have come to a decision for yourself, avoid other people, because they can only weaken your energy. Just at the very moment, when one has not yet lost one's outward clumsiness, when one is still green, a "ni fait ni à faire" is enough to cause dis-

couragement for half a year, after which one sees at last that one ought not to have let oneself be led astray. Of two people I know the soul's struggle: am I a painter or not?

Of Rappard and of myself—a struggle hard sometimes, a struggle that just makes the difference between us and certain other people who take things less seriously; as for us, we feel wretched at times; but each fit of melancholy brings a little light, a little progress; certain other people have less trouble, work easier perhaps, but then their personal character develops itself less. You, too, would have that struggle, and I tell you, know it well, that you are in danger of being upset by people who undoubtedly have the very best intentions.

If you hear a voice within you saying: “you are no painter,” *then paint by all means*, lad, and that voice will be silenced, but only by working; he who, when he feels thus, goes to friends and tells his troubles, loses part of his manliness, part of the best that is in him; your friends can only be those who themselves struggle against it, who raise your activity by their own example of action. One must undertake it with confidence, with a certain assurance that one is doing a reasonable thing, like the farmer drives his plough, or like our friend in the scratch below, who



harrow, even drags the harrow himself. If one has no horse, one is one's own horse—many people do so here.

There is a saying by Gustave Doré which I have always admired: “j’ai la patience d’un bœuf.” I find in it a certain goodness, a certain resolute honesty, in short, it has a deep meaning that saying, it is the word of a real artist. When one thinks of the men from whose heart such a saying sprang, all the arguments one too often hears of art dealers about “natural gifts,” seem to become a terrible raven’s croaking. “J’ai la patience,” how quiet it sounds, how dignified; they wouldn’t even say it but for that very raven’s croaking. I am no artist—how coarse it sounds—even to think so of oneself—ought one not to have patience, ought one not to learn patience from nature, learn patience from seeing the corn slowly ripen, seeing things grow—should one think oneself so absolutely dead, as to imagine one would not grow any more? Should one thwart one’s own development on purpose? I say this to explain why I think it so foolish to speak about natural gifts and no natural gifts.

But in order to grow, one must be rooted in the earth. So I tell you, take root in the soil of Drenthe—you will germinate there—don’t wither on the side-walk. You will say there are plants that grow in the city—that may be, but you are corn, and your place is in the cornfield. . . .

I don’t suppose at all I am telling you anything new, I only ask: don’t thwart your own best thoughts. Think over that idea with a certain jolly good courage, rather than look at things with melancholy. I see that even Millet, just because he was so serious, couldn’t help keeping good courage. That’s something peculiar, not in all styles of painting, but in Millet, Israëls, Breton, Boughton, Herkomer and others.

Those who seek real simplicity are themselves so simple, and their view of life is so full of good-will and good courage, even in hard times.

Think these things over, write me about them. It must be “une révolution qui est, puisqu’il faut qu’elle soit.” With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear brother,

I cannot count the grains in a sack of corn—just by smelling it—I cannot look through the planks of the stable door—but I can see sometimes by the lumps whether it is a sack of potatoes or of corn, or, though the stable door be closed, I can hear by the squealing when the pig is killed.

In the same way, I can, and will only judge the circumstances in which you find yourself for the moment, from the indications I have, however vague they may be, and it is not a prediction I am making.

Tell me this one thing, am I mistaken when I conclude from some symptoms, that there is a question of one of those malignant crises which at times used to arise in large businesses in the large cities. Is the aspect of things fatal? Do you feel this cannot be redressed? Or do you feel redress is possible, therefore this crisis is no reason to change your position?

Unless you would write to me: “no, it is not so bad as that,” I for myself think matters have a rather fatal aspect.

You know, lad—as long as the position was tolerable—as long as business was possible, I have never dared to advise you openly: give it up, especially out of respect for your position, which you kept, not for your own pleasure, but for the welfare of us all.

But your former duties, which, moreover, you have taken on yourself out of free will, cease to be duties when the condition of business becomes so, that to continue would not only be a hopeless struggle, but, at the same time, would inevitably bring about your own ruin.

In short, there are limits, and my foreboding tells me you have almost reached that point.

I know that my words will be in strange contrast to those of others you might consult, who want to pass off the matter with, “it will come all right,” “the desired changes will happen.” I do not wish to flatter you, all right, I do not flatter. As to raising your courage, yes, I dare do so, I dare give you the very highest courage and serenity, but only as regards painting, and about Paris,



I can only say this: Look out well, if on that battlefield *fate* is not against you. With a hearty handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

The country here is very curious.

Suppose somebody should put the question to you, would you like to become a painter, if you could be transported suddenly into the period of forty years ago, when things were as at the time of Corot's youth, and if at the same time, you would not be alone, but would have a companion? The reason I ask you this is because I feel exactly as if I had been transported in the period above-mentioned in this country, where progress has got no farther than stage coach and barge, *where everything is more virgin than I have seen in any other place.*

*You* have seen Drenthe—from the train, in a hurry, long ago—but if you come in the most remote back country of Drenthe, it will make quite a different impression on you still, you will even feel just as if you lived in the time of Van Goyen, Ruysdael, Michel, in short, in what one perhaps hardly feels even in *the present* Barbizon.

That is an important thing, I think, for in such a nature, things can be roused in a heart which otherwise would never have been aroused. I mean something of that free, cheerful spirit of former times, I mean that the nervous indecision can be hushed by it. But I believe that being *alone* in such a part, would handicap one and make one dull for want of company. And I for my part long very much for your companionship.

But I don't think of you in the first place for *my* own sake, I think of you in the first place for *your* own sake, although one is inseparable from the other, although one completes the other.

Theo,

Some time ago you wrote to me about a certain difference in our respective physiognomies. All right. And your conclusion was, that I was more of a thinker. What can I say to that? I do feel

in myself a faculty for thinking, but that faculty is not what I feel specially organized in me. I think myself to be something different than specially a thinker. When I think of you, I see very characteristic action, that is well and good, but also most decidedly not standing apart, and, on the contrary, accompanied by so much sentiment and real *thought* too, that for me the conclusion is, that there is between you and me more resemblance than difference. I do not say there is no difference—but having learnt to know you better of late, the difference seems to me smaller than I used to think sometimes in former years.

When I consider our temperament and type of physiognomy, I find similarity, and very pronounced resemblance between, for instance, the Puritans and ourselves. I mean the people from about Cromwell's time, the little group of men and women who sailed in the *Mayflower* from the old world to America, and settled there, firmly resolved to live simple lives.

Times are different—they cut down woods—we would seek it in painting. I know that the initiative taken by a small group, called in history Pilgrim Fathers, however small in itself, had great consequences, and about ourselves, I should think that in the first place we would philosophize little about great consequences, and only look out a path for ourselves to travel through life as straight-way as possible. To meditate about consequences is not our way, *neither yours nor mine.*

If I speak about the Pilgrim Fathers, it is because of the physiognomy, to show you that certain reddish-haired people, with square foreheads, are neither only thinkers nor only men of action, but used to have both elements combined. On one of Boughton's pictures, I know a little figure of one of those Puritans, for which I should think *you* had posed if I didn't know better. It is exactly, exactly the same physiognomy—a small silhouette on a rock against a background of sea and fog; I can show you myself also, that is to say, that variation of the same physiognomy, but my profile is less characteristic.

Father used to ponder about the story of Jacob and Esau, with regard to you and me—not quite amiss—but luckily there is less discord to name *one* point of difference, and in the Bible itself there are plenty of examples of better relations between brothers than existed between the honourable patriarchs above mentioned.

I myself have sometimes thought about that being a thinker, but I understood more and more that it was not my vocation, and because of the unlucky prejudice, that a man who feels the need to philosophize, is *not* practical, and only belongs among the dreamers, because this prejudice is greatly respected in Society, I often knocked my head because I didn't keep things enough to myself.

But since then, that very history of the Puritans, and the history of Cromwell, as Carlyle, for instance, gives it, made me see that thinking and acting do not exclude each other, and that the sharp barriers which nowadays are drawn between thinking and acting—as if the one excluded the other—do not exist in fact. As to doubting whether one is an artist or not—that question is too much of an abstraction.

I confess, however, that I don't object to think it over, if only at the same time I can draw and paint.

And my aim in my life is to make pictures and drawings, as many and as well as I can, then, at the end of my life, I hope to pass away, looking back with love and tender regret, and thinking: "Oh, pictures I might have made!" But this does not exclude the making of what is possible, mind you. Do you object to this either for me or for yourself?

Theo, I declare I prefer to think how arms, legs, head are attached to the trunk, rather than whether I myself am or am not more or less an artist.

I suppose that you prefer to think of a sky with grey clouds, and their silver lining above a muddy field, than to be engrossed in the question of your own personality. Now, I for my part, seeing both in you and in myself something of the Puritan character, which so unites thinking and acting, and is so far removed from wanting to be only a thinker or only a machine, which needs principles both of simplicity *and* sensible work, I do *not* admit a separation or divergence, much less an opposition between you and me.

In my opinion, it would be an error of judgment if you continued business in Paris.

So the conclusion is, both brothers painters. . . .

At all events, I count it among the possibilities, that you yourself become conscious that painting is your vocation, and then,

dear brother, "puritan sans le savoir," it might be that your days in Paris were numbered, that an old world closed itself to you, in a rather ungenerous way—but at the same time a new world opened itself to you.

Well, think it over, more or less deeply. But it would be of little use, if you said: Vincent, keep silent about it; for to that my answer is: Theo, it will not keep silent within *yourself*.

On le contient plus malaisément  
Que la source des grands fleuves.

Theo, I heard a few times of the poor woman, she seems to do her best by working, by washing for people, by going out as a charwoman. Her writing is almost indecipherable and incoherent, she seems to be sorry about some things in the past. The children are well and happy.

My pity and affection for her are certainly not dead, and I hope that a bond of affection may remain between us, though I do not see the possibility or the good of living again together—pity perhaps is no love, but, for all that, it can be rooted deeply enough.

Well, brother, to change the subject, it is snowing here to-day, in the form of enormous hailstones. I call it snow because of the effect.

I don't speak about the beauty of the scenery here, because I would have to say *too much* about it to you. As to the work, I am almost too preoccupied with the idea that you should begin it too, which quite absorbs me. I wish it were settled, then we could make decided plans for working together. Drenthe is so beautiful, it absorbs and satisfies me so absolutely, that if I could not be here for ever, I rather wish I had not seen it. It is unutterably beautiful.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Having once written about it, I thought it over since out on the heath. The same thing I had thought over so often already.

Among the old masters as well as among the modern ones, one often meets with the same instance of two brothers being painters, in whose work there is more resemblance than difference. They are quite different, but perfectly complete each other. Take, for instance, the Ostades, Adriaan and Isaac. Well, you know yourself many other cases. The Van Eycks too.

And in the present time, Jules and Emile Breton, to name only a few. And so very often already have I thought how delightful it must be to work together, and how productive the two can be together, for the very reason that one supports the other, and saves the other many times of melancholy.

I cannot repeat to you often enough, lad, that, when one is thirty, one just *begins*. Consider the biographies of artists, even many who painted from their earliest years, change only then, find their own personality only then. I only ask you to take those things into consideration. I know one stands for the question: "bread."

The argument, I must eat, I must live somewhere, is not wrong, but I think it absolutely correct.

Very well, but to everybody who says: "I have not the means," I put one question; that question is: "Friend, what are your claims, how high is your standard? Is your character so that you think, like Corot, for instance, who, when he could not pay for a dinner, didn't mind buying a loaf at the baker's and eating it out in the fields? In short, can you manage with little and not care in the least for the conventions of life?"

*You* are at bottom exactly so, and would perfectly put up with many things. And though the question "bread" may not be quite settled then, it is cleared up a great deal. When I think of the possibility of your coming here, sooner or later, and I begin to calculate, I arrive at the conclusion that together we need *little*, or no more, than I alone.

And besides, I firmly believe that your presence would be a stimulus to me in so many things, that it would be such a help to me to talk and discuss things, and exchange views with you, that I should be able to work better.

Now, hardly a day passes that I do not make one thing or another. As practice makes perfect, I cannot but make progress, each drawing one makes, each study one paints, is a step forward.



It is true, it is the same as on a road, one sees the church spire at the end, but, as the ground is undulating, when one thinks to have arrived, there is another bit one had not seen at first, and which must still be covered. But one comes nearer and nearer. After some longer or shorter time, I do not know how long, I shall arrive at the point of beginning to sell.

All right, when once I am so far, it won't be by halves, for I don't work by halves. And I try my hand at different things at a time, therefore I shall have more than one string to my bow, more than one arrow; that is what I, for my part, can throw in the gulf "bread." Things may change for me, and though now I do not sell, notwithstanding all my drudging—I repeat: things may change.

We should need, let us say, at least fr. 150 a month as a minimum, fr. 200 rather, we should have to find credit for that, not without a guarantee, but our work would be that guarantee. Now, let us suppose we should have to work still two years, before we begin to earn, well, more than we spend, so that we can pay off.

Two hundred francs a month in two years is 2400 francs. Well, let us make 1500 guilders of it.

As a guarantee may serve—I now think of you and me working together, that we have ourselves put in a great deal already, and have laid a certain foundation. My knowledge is my own, some things of drawing, even some things of painting, are firmly rooted and acquired not by pure chance, but by honest work. I call this another guarantee that we do not build castles in the air.

Look here, Theo, I shouldn't be able to talk with you if you didn't possess a certain self-confidence, a certain self-knowledge. I may have told you before that you are at bottom an artist, and I am more and more strengthened in that opinion. You will say, I cannot make anything—no, of course not *now*, but after a year's work, when the first difficulties have somewhat cleared up, you will feel with the greatest serenity, that, yes, perhaps not everybody can become a painter by sheer drudging, when he lacks a certain disposition of mind, but in yourself you would perceive that disposition to meditate, to think and analyse, to *feel* the beauty in nature, and that you can be an artist for the very reason that you possess both activity and energy, which now, however, work in another direction, so nothing is left for art. But if that same

activity became the motive power for your sense of beauty, the result would be a true painter.

I must come back for a moment to that question of "bread." A great many things which are said to be impossible are possible after all. It would be hard work, but by the pleasure of being together, by living together in that unutterably beautiful scenery, especially by the consciousness of being two *craftsmen*, lad, how delightful it would be. So delightful that I hardly dare to think of it, and yet cannot help doing so, though that happiness seems too great, for you as well as for myself, because we are not used to having *pleasure* in our lives, and feel that is rather more for other people than for us.

We should need a credit to the amount of 1500 guilders. Where and how to get it I do not know. I will reckon out for you how we should use them. With my landlord here, we should make an arrangement for two years, perhaps pay a part in advance. I think that for 1000 guilders, he would give us both board during those years, would let us have this room where I live now, in short, we would be free from all domestic cares during those two years, and would be able to work calmly and quietly.

Two years is a pretty long time, is all that you would need under the circumstances to reach a certain height.

Then we have still some money left to lay up a big lot of colours to supply ourselves well.

There are few things then that can upset us, or make us change our plans. We are in for it then and *must* go on. We have insured our lives as to board and lodging, and cannot go back, but must, must, must go forward and win.

As to you, I think you must act differently from what I did. That's past now. Up to the present I have acted as I thought best, but for you, I wish you would start painting at once, *I know exactly what you would like to make here.*

I should like *you* to try your hand at once at landscape, in the sentiment of *Michel*, which I see here all the time. It is quite absolutely *Michel*, *that's* what it is here. I feel sure that I can show you the way in this, because just now I tried things of the same kind, of which I do not pretend they are as good as *Michel's*, but I daresay that if you are as far advanced as that, you will be able to find your own way further.

As for me, *especially if you were here*, I would concentrate more and more on the figure.

I will just make a scratch of the landscapes which I have on the easel. That is the kind of studies which I should like you to try at once: To learn to look at the landscape at large, in its simple lines and contrasts of light and brown. The scratch at the top is



what I saw to-day, it was absolutely Michel. That earth was superb in reality. I don't think my study ripe enough yet, but I was struck by the effect, and as to light and shade, it was, indeed, as I draw it for you here.

The one at the bottom is a tender green little cornfield in the foreground, and drooping grasses, behind the cottage,

two piles of peat, again a glimpse of the heath, and a very light sky.

Look here, what I want to say is this: that's the kind of thing you ought to start with, and from the very beginning I believe you will do well not to draw exclusively. All I write you here, I mean in full, full earnest. I have thought it over so long.

The country is splendid, splendid, everything calls to you: paint! It is so typical and so varied. Look here, lad, is it not true that however things go, there are always financial obstacles, and where or how on earth can a time of struggle lead to a more definite peace?—to a great peace which nothing on earth can again disturb. I for my part can say no better than that I give all my own studies as a pledge and guarantee for our giving back the money we absolutely need the first two years. I think we must be able to find it. I name the minimum, because both you and I would live as economically as possible.

As to me, I have a lot of plans, but I do wish I had some 100 guilders to spend to replenish my painting materials. And I wish I knew for sure, that “*quand même*,” I could stay here for two years, for instance. I have now so little security for the future, and I wish I knew for sure that I shall not have to leave again after some time. The plan which I laid down here is liable to changes.

But I think the basis of it remains, we must arrange things, so that for two years we can work in peace.

After those two years, I shall be so far that I earn regularly, and hope to have fixed work at such conditions that both you and I can go on in the same way.

The plan is simple enough; about you, too, people would gossip, but there would be a six hours' distance of landscape à la Michel between the poor little town of Hoogeveen and yourself, so it would not trouble you in the least, would it? You would be rid of everything, and about your thirtieth year; even the house Goupil would seem to you like a dream, and you would hardly understand that once you were the head of the Gallery on the Boulevard, and were treated politely, always politely, by Monsieur the Director. As to my coming to Paris, well, I think it a long way round, though if you think it better, all right; but that so entirely depends on the change you make, and if you change *in another way* than by becoming a painter, I should be afraid that



in the end it would have to come after all, and that meanwhile it would again have become more difficult. I cannot write differently than I do.

You are a man of business; for that very reason. I do not think you will be prejudiced enough to reject all this. There are always, everywhere, financial obstacles and cares; one cannot avoid them anywhere, and, after all, this is something solid, as it makes you a handicraftsman. Is that going backward—no, it is not going backward. I think it is the right way. It would be a manly action, an action which demands “*foi de charbonnier*.” So I repeat: you must have that “*foi de charbonnier*.” Well, lad, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Do write soon again.

Think of Barbizon, that story is sublime. Those who originally started there, when they came there—they were by no means all outwardly what they were at bottom. The country formed them, they only knew: it is no good in town, I must go to the country. I suppose they thought, I must learn to work, become quite different, aye, the opposite to what I am now. They said I am no good now, I am going to renew myself in nature. As for me, I reason in the same way, and though I should go to Paris if I absolutely had to, and should find something to do there—I think my future here infinitely, infinitely better.

The greatest attraction for me in Paris, the thing which would help me most to make progress, is being with you, and the friction of ideas with somebody who knows what a picture is, and who understands the reason of my trials. Because you are in Paris, I approve of Paris, and as I should be less alone there, I would make better progress *even* there.

Enough of this for the moment. I do not say it would be possible if we couldn't pay for our bread and our workshop. But with the sum I named as minimum, I should most decidedly think it possible.

For myself I have a simple plan, I go out in the open air, and paint what strikes me, steep myself in the fragrant air of the heath, and believe that in time I shall become fresher, newer, better.

So, lad, do come and paint with me on the heath, in the potato



field, come and walk with me behind the plough and the shepherd—come and sit with me by the fire—let the storm that blows across the heath blow through you.

Break loose from your bonds. I do not know the future, in what way it would be different, if everything would go smoothly with us, but I cannot speak differently, don't seek it in Paris, don't seek it in America, that is always the same for ever and ever exactly the same. Make a thorough change indeed, try the heath.

Good-bye, write soon. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear brother,

I must just tell you about a trip to Zweekoo, the village where Liebermann stayed a long while, and where he made studies for his picture of the last Salon, that with the washerwomen. Where Termeulen and Jules Backhuysen have also been a long time. Imagine a ride across the heath, at three o'clock in the morning, in an open cart (I went with the landlord who had to go to the market at Assen), along a road or "diek" as they call it here, which had been banked up with mud instead of sand. It was more curious still than going by barge. At the first glimpse of dawn, when the roosters everywhere began to crow near the sheds spread all over the heath, the few cottages we passed—surrounded by thin poplars whose yellow leaves one could hear drop to earth—an old stumpy tower on a churchyard, with earthen wall and beech hedge—the level landscapes of heath or cornfields—it all, all, all became exactly like the most beautiful Corot's. A quietness, a mystery, a peace, as only he has painted it.

But when we arrived at Zweekoo at six o'clock in the morning it was still quite dark; the real Corot's I saw earlier still in the morning.

The entrance to the village was splendid: Enormous mossy roofs of houses, stables, sheepfolds, barns.

The houses here lie amply between oak trees of a splendid bronze. In the moss are tones of gold green, in the ground, tones

of reddish, or bluish or yellowish dark lilac-grey, in the green of the cornfields, tones of inexpressible purity, on the wet trunks, tones of black, contrasting with the golden rain of whirling, clustering autumn leaves hanging in loose tufts, as if they had been blown there, detached, and with the sky glimmering through them, from the poplars, the birches, the linden and the apple trees.

The sky smooth and clear, luminous, not white but a lilac which can hardly be deciphered, white scintillating with red, blue and yellow, in which everything is reflected, and which one feels everywhere above one, which is vaporous and melts together with thin mist beneath—harmonizing everything in a gamut of delicate grey. At Zweeloo, however, I didn't find a single painter, and people said *in winter*, none ever came.

I, on the contrary, hope to be there *just* this winter.

As there were no painters, I decided not to wait for the return of my landlord, but to walk back, and to make some drawings on the way. So I began a sketch of that little apple orchard, of which Liebermann made his large picture. And then I walked back the road along which we had driven early in the morning.

The whole country around Zweeloo is for the moment entirely covered—as far as the eye can reach—by young corn, that most, most tender green I know.

With a sky over it of a tender lilac-white, which gives an effect—I don't think it can be painted, but which is for me the keynote which one must know, in order to understand the key-notes of other effects.

A black patch of earth—infinite—a clear sky of tender lilac-white. From that earth sprouts the young corn, it is almost mouldy-looking with that corn. That's what the good fertile parts of Drenthe are at bottom; the whole, in a hazy atmosphere. Think of "*le dernier jour de la création*" by *Brion*; yesterday it seemed to me I understood the meaning of that picture.

The bad soil of Drenthe is just the same—but the black earth is blacker still—like soot—not lilac-black like the furrows, and dreadfully covered with ever-rotting heather and peat. I see that everywhere, the casualties on that infinite background, on the moors, the turf huts, in the fertile parts, very primitive buildings of farms and sheepfolds, with low, very low little walls and enormous mossy roofs. Oak trees all around.

When one has walked for hours and hours through that country, one feels that there is really nothing but that infinite earth—that mould of corn or heather, that infinite sky. Horses and men seem no larger than fleas. One is not aware of anything, be it ever so large in itself, one only knows that there is earth and sky. However, in one's quality of a little speck noticing other little specks—leaving the infinite apart—one finds every little speck to be a Millet.

I passed a little old church exactly, exactly "*L'église de Greville*," from Millet's little picture at the Luxembourg; instead of the little peasant with his spade of that picture, there was here a shepherd with a flock of sheep walking along the hedge. In the background, there was not a glimpse of the sea, but only of the sea of young corn, the sea of the furrows instead of the sea of the waves.

The effect produced was the same. Then I saw ploughers very busy—a sandcart, a shepherd, menders of the road, dungcarts. In a little inn on the road I drew an old woman at the spinning-wheel, a dark little silhouette as from a fairy-tale—a dark little silhouette against a light window, through which one saw the clear sky, and a small path through the delicate green, and a few geese picking grass.

And then when twilight fell—imagine the quiet, the peace of it all! Imagine then a little avenue of high poplars with autumn leaves, imagine a broad muddy road, all black mud, with an infinite heath to the right, and an endless heath to the left, a few black triangular silhouettes of turf huts, through the little windows of which shines the red light of the little fire, with a few pools of dirty yellowish water that reflect the sky, and in which trunks lie rotting; imagine that puddle in the evening twilight, with a white sky over it, everywhere the contrast of black and white. And in that puddle a rough figure—the shepherd—a heap of oval masses, half-wool, half-mud, that jostle against each other, push each other—the flock. You see them coming—you find yourself in the middle of them—you turn round and follow them. Slowly and reluctantly they trudge along the muddy road. However, there looms in the distance the farm—a few mossy roofs, and piles of straw and peat between the poplars.

The sheepfold is again like the silhouette of a triangle—dark. The door is wide open like the entrance to a dark cave. Through

the chinks of the boards behind it gleams the light of the sky. The whole caravan of masses of wool and mud disappear in that cave—the shepherd and a woman with a lantern, shut the doors behind them.

That coming home of the flock in the twilight was the finale of the symphony I heard yesterday.

That day passed like a dream, I had been so absorbed the whole day in that pathetic music that I literally had forgotten even food and drink—I had taken a piece of brown bread and a cup of coffee in the little inn where I drew the spinning-wheel. The day was past, and from dawn till twilight, or rather from one night till the other, I had forgotten myself in that symphony.

I came home, and sitting near the fire, I felt I was hungry, yes, very hungry. But now you see how it is here. One feels exactly as if one had been at an exhibition of the *Cent chef-d'œuvres*, for instance; what does one bring home from such a day? Only a number of scratches. Yet there is another thing one brings home—a calm ardour to work.

Do write soon, it is Friday to-day, but your letter has not yet arrived, I am longing to get it. It also takes some time to get it changed, as I have to go to Hoogetveen for it, and then back here. We do not know how things will go, otherwise I should say, *now* the simplest thing would be perhaps to send the money *once* a month. At all events, write soon. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear brother,

Thanks for your letter, though you yourself admit it to be rather short. I know that many people at present call everything that is but an interchange of *views*, everything that regards no definite *business* or *facts* quite superfluous and even nonsensical in a letter, and so they arrive at a certain very concise form, which, however, is at the same time, a rather unsatisfactory, disappointing way of writing.

Well, brother, I wish you had written about it less curtly, but

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it may have been that you were too busy. As to your idea of letting some time pass over it, and then looking at the question again from all points of view, I think it wise, and not at all wrong in itself. But you add something to that proposal which I will answer quite plainly. You say: "Think it over if there is not also much to be said for my staying at Goupil's." Well, brother, on that subject I have thought formerly as well as now, more than I wrote you till now, and as you ask me now to consider its advantages, I will, in all sincerity, tell you how it seems to me.

I tell you that I doubt more and more the advantage of being with Goupil to be really for our good, I mean for your good, for the good of those at home and of myself—I don't consider the financial advantage alone, but at the same time, other doubtful advantages, for instance, direct or indirect relations with influential persons. In short, taking everything altogether, I put a question-mark after *advantage*.

You must understand me well—perhaps—no, certainly—there has been a crisis at home as well as in my own life, when I believe indeed the life of us all has been literally *saved* by you. We have been saved from ruin by protection and support received from you; especially for me, the situation was critical. If now I have arrived at a point, that when I stand before an object or figure I feel within me clearly, distinctly, unhesitatingly, the power of drawing it—of rendering it—not perfectly, but true in its general structure and proportion, well, that point had absolutely, absolutely to be reached, and if I have reached it, it has been, in the first place, because the help from you was a kind of fence or protection between a friendly world and myself, and because I could in all quiet think almost exclusively of my drawing, and my thoughts were not crushed by fatally overwhelming, material cares. And though I don't know the matter in detail—I believe that at home they are also under great obligations to you. And indirectly, also to Goupil & Co., so I fully acknowledge the advantage *up till now*, but *in the future* there comes the interrogation mark after *advantage*. If till now, your help was indispensable, I believe that for the future, I at least must try to manage differently.

The germinating seed must not be exposed to a frosty wind—that was the case with me in the beginning. If you had not been there, the words of Uncle Vincent "*ni fait, ni à faire*," the words of



Tersteeg and their turning a cold shoulder upon me, that accompanied it at a critical moment, I fear would have been fatal to me, like a too cold wind for the germinating corn. But when the winter corn is once rooted in the earth, it becomes a little stronger, and it struggles through the winter as best it can, at least it *must* get through. And now, brother, I would think it mean of myself if I said: the money from you *must* continue, inducing you in that way to stay with Goupil & Co. If you arrive at that decision, I am so decidedly against it, warn you so decidedly—the art business will betray you in the end—that I will take no part in forcing you to such a decision, by needing help myself.

And though I hope we shall remain as true friends as ever, and shall always feel the tie of our brotherhood, I repeat, it is my intention to refuse your financial help as soon as you bind yourself *for good* to Goupil's, because I am sure you would repent of such a decision in the end, and it would bring you in a position of which you might say: I wish I had never accepted it, and at the same time, you would think: why did my brother and my parents push me to it then? I will *not* be guilty of bringing you to that decision, so now you know how I think, at bottom, in all frankness about the “advantages (?) of Goupil's.”

How should I manage then? Well, for instance, I should try to get a job as illustrator for a magazine, or, in short, do anything “*n'importe quoi*,” for which perhaps you yourself would know an opportunity, or in which you could advise me, for instance, about the *Moniteur Universel*, though I do not consider that the most desirable.

But if I were left quite to myself, I would perhaps try a chance in Paris, or London, or the Hague, in short, in some city in a printer's or a magazine's office, of course, trying at the same time to make and sell drawings and pictures, and after that, manage to get back to Drenthe.

Then I should want, however, to bring myself in the utmost stress in order to *force* myself to productivity, and would of my own accord beg to stop the present assistance.

But, brother, this is in case you *stay* at Goupil & Co.'s, and in the other possible case, of your deciding to become a painter, we would of course feel the pressure of an enormous compulsion behind us, and in those circumstances, would have to support each other by

faithful comradeship, but though I shall always be, and remain, grateful beyond all words and expressions for your help, my intention for the future is fixed: if you stay at Goupil's, this will push me straightway to the decision above mentioned, though our friendship will remain of course, unless you would object to have anything to do with me.

If it might be—and I don't think it absolutely impossible—that not the circumstances, but *your own soul* lead you to painting, well, then it is quite natural for us to join hands for one same aim and ideal.

But as to trying to put up with the thought of approving that you should stay with Goupil, of considering the *advantages* (?) of it—you see how I consider these things. Of Goupil's I have my own experiences in the past; a look thereon, a look at the present, at the same time, a look in the future lead me to a Beware! and for myself, I think Paris enervating, and I see no good in staying there definitely, neither for myself nor for you.

As for me, perhaps I shall have to be there for a time, in order to get some connections (made impossible for me at the Hague), but I will stay in the country as much as I can, and the only thing which counts for me is painting or drawing. Good-bye, lad, for the rest, let some time pass over it, and receive in thought a hearty handshake from,

Yours,  
Vincent.

You know, brother, I had promised Wisselingh to show him before the winter some studies from Drenthe. Now I send you to-day six studies, be so kind to show them to him some day, as a small sign of life, though of course I do not suppose that they will be considered saleable.

The painting out of doors is over, it is already too cold of late. But what a relief it would be if I could settle for good in these parts.

The house rent is very low; if only one had company, how delightful it would be to rent a peasant's cottage, and to fix up everything more solidly and less haphazardly than in an inn.

Well, I repeat, let us possess our souls in patience, let things decide for themselves.

To take a house alone is so very melancholy and chilly. There must be some life in the camp, in order to keep things going, and to prevent stagnation.

But, Theo, how inexpressibly beautiful it is here!

You cannot yet see it at all from my studies; before I can express how it really is here, I have still much to learn, and it is also a question of time.

One thing I declare, that this country has on me an influence of calmness, of faith, of courage, and I believe you need that influence too—it would be the very, very best thing for you; it would make you find again yourself, your soul, but in a more solid and complete way than at the time of drawing mills. But I am afraid you consider what I say as the product of my fancy, my words as idle, and without foundation.

And I admit it is very difficult to know what one has to do. Money plays a brutal part in society, and I partly share your feeling in that respect. But then, I feel such a vivid hope, that painting will set free our real energy, and yet keep us afloat, though the first years may be very difficult. Let come what may, is the only thing one can say. As to my saying, if you stay for good at Goupil's, I shall be obliged to refuse your help, do not suppose I think too highly of my present work.

No, I am fervently aware it has no market value, but my idea is, I want to work without more protection than others have, and I shall throw myself headlong into it, not because I think I have arrived, but because I believe: "*je grandirai dans la tempête.*"

You may ask, what is my intention in saying: "stay for good" at Goupil's? Look here—now the winter is before the door, and I sit here lost on the heath, and what else can I do for the purpose but work?

But suppose towards spring, for instance, the month of March, you are still at Goupil's on good terms, without any prospect of leaving. That is what I should call "stay for good," and then I should try to take another direction, or rather, I would force myself to it, by an enormous pressure.

Fortune favours the bold, says the proverb, and though perhaps something may be said against it, its basis I decidedly believe to be a fact in the same way as the opposite: that moral weakness or want of courage brings, at the end, a kind of fatal doom.

So my plan is always to risk rather too much than too little; if one is defeated by too much, well, be it so. In short, I don't want my needs to be a reason for you to stay, if you want to stay, do so, but not for my sake, as I think it decidedly not the right way for you.

Once more a hearty handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Please don't take amiss what I tell you, as if I had a personal grudge against you, if you stay, for even then I approve of you as you are.

It is absolutely nothing else but a question, that I don't want it to be said that I ever should consent to your being in a profession against your wish, with my knowledge, more or less for my sake.

"Je ne veux point que la poche d'autrui pâtisse de mes hardiesses."

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Dear Theo,

May I draw your attention to the fact that the post of Monday 26th November, has just passed, without having brought your letter. As it has still to go to Hoogetveen and back, we have now arrived at a point where it almost amounts to my having failed to receive one remittance, for suppose the next mail brings your letter, I cannot get the money before 28th November, late in the evening, or 29th November in the morning.

So this is, properly speaking, a deficit, for your next letter, which otherwise I would have expected about 1st December, probably won't come then. For since I am here at New Amsterdam, the letters come later and later. If I had received a word of warning according to our arrangement, it would not rouse in me that feeling which now involuntarily I must gradually get. That is to say, a certain insincerity creeps into our relationship, which began by being sincere, by mutually understanding and respecting each other.

That this is a disappointment to me, and worries me considerably, even apart from the thoughts I cannot keep from rising within me, is not what weighs heaviest on my mind to-day.

It is rather an indefinite uneasiness about you, though—perhaps just *because*—I but yesterday heard from home they had a good letter from you. So I should conclude from it that the crisis in question is suppressed, averted, stopped, well, whatever you like to call it. And so this would be a confirmation of your words to me: “I believe that for the present things will remain as they are.”

About which, however, I hinted that it only half pleased me, or rather that it alarmed more than reassured me about your future.

I only hope now that you will understand and not *misunderstand* me.

At this moment I do not suspect you of insincerity—please keep hold of that as my starting-point.

So because I believe in you as an honest man, I consider you relatively safe hitherto in spite of difficulties, even in case of a catastrophe. . . . My words may sound gloomy, very well. For myself there are moments when my own prospects seem very dark to me—but as I wrote to you already, I do not believe that my fate depends on what seems against it. All kinds of things may be against me, but there *may* be one thing more powerful than what I see threatening me. I used the word fatality—for lack of a better word; no one falls before his time—so as for me, I resign myself, and act as if nothing were the matter.

As for you, I repeat, as long as I believe in your sincerity (and I do not believe the contrary yet) I also believe that you are safe in spite of happiness or unhappiness, were it only in that conscious reality—which hovers over the aspect of things. But I could not help smiling at what they wrote from home about a “good” letter, with one single vague word, that’s all I know about it, and that it seemed business had again taken a more favourable turn. I thought: very well—if you people say that you are satisfied, be satisfied then—I did not think more of it, however, than that.

But know this one thing, brother—that whatever choice you might make, or whatever decision you might or might not take, that whether you become better in my eyes, or worse, and also whether or not there will be more or less direct relations between us, with respect to money or business, this will *not* be regarded by *me* as a reason for estrangement. Difference of opinion, difference in view of life, difference of principles, suppose they might show themselves later on—they do not so far—are for *me* no reason to



overlook the fact that we are brothers, and that we agree on many points. I just emphasize this, to our mutual reassurance I hope. You are free, I am free to act as seems most reasonable to us, are we not? And if one always takes this for granted, that one must not blame one another or become hostile, or spiteful, or throw obstacles in each other's way, because of eventual difference of opinion, then, though there may come a time of greater coolness, things will, thank God, remain free from fanaticism or intrigue.

Which, alas, is not always the case with everyone. It is the same with the money, about which I wrote at the beginning of my letter. What I mean *in the first place* is, let that never become a point of discord between us, and, know it well, that of course I don't blame you in the least for not having it, even when it brings me in terrible difficulties sometimes.

And as to the capital already invested in it by you and by me—for after all, I put my work into it, throw myself headlong into it—as to all these things—after all, I still cherish the hope that in the future it will redress itself—though, though—perhaps not only I, but you too on your side, have been mistaken in a few things, which, however, are not yet fatal or past remedy, and which I will not even mention now. Do not find in this letter nor in the preceding ones, a distrust, a suspicion, or an insult, take it only as a warning concerning some Parisian things, which I want you to consider, not as if I were infallible, not as if I should insist on your agreeing with me—but because I believe I see certain symptoms which seem to me of an enigmatic and ominous nature.

Did you receive my studies? Since then I have made a large painted one, and a large sketch of a drawbridge, and even a second painted one of it, with another effect.

As soon as there is snow, I hope to use them to get more exactly the snow effect, that is to say, keeping the same lines and structure which I have found now. Well, I hope to hear from you soon. With a handshake, believe me

Yours,  
Vincent.

Yesterday I heard that Furnée has passed his last exam, and now he has his hands free again to go on with his painting.

Though it may not be my first preoccupation, yet I am far from indifferent to the reason of *almost ten days'* difference in receipt of the money.

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Dear Theo,

(1st December.)

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. Your letter explains to me the reason of your silence. You thought that "*feeling myself well-off for the moment*," I offered you an "*ultimatum*," like, for instance, the Nihilists perhaps send to the Czar.

Luckily, for you *and* for me, there is *no* question of such a thing here.

However, I understand your idea *now that I know it*, but that is the last straw indeed. In the first place, I meant something quite different—I simply meant "I shouldn't want to thrive if you were the loser by it"—I should not want to develop the artist in me, if you had to suppress your artistry for my sake. I should never approve of your repressing the artist in yourself, for the sake of whosoever it may be, for the sake of either father, mother, sister, brother or wife. That was my meaning—perhaps expressed nervously, and in wrong terms—but I most decidedly meant no more, or nothing else.

You understand it now, don't you?

But know this, Brother, that I am absolutely cut off from the outer world—except from you—so that it *made me crazy* when your letter did not come at the moment, when, far from "being well-off," I was very hard pressed, *though I did not mention it*, because I feel myself rather above the cares that gnaw at my heart, which torture I perhaps can explain, but do *not* consider *merited*. Regarding "*I should not want to thrive if another were the loser by it*," *this*, the real meaning of what you took for an ultimatum, I hope it will always remain my conviction, either in prosperity or in "agony." Your conclusion of my "being well-off" was rather superficial, or rash I think, though the fault must have lain in my way of expressing it, but certainly not in my *mood*.

I will tell you once more, that, since I am here, I had to put my material in good order, I had to supply myself with colours, I had

to make some trips, I had to pay my board and lodging, had to send something to the woman, had to pay off some debts. All these things together kept me *very hard up*, to use a *mild* expression. Add to this, that peculiar torture: loneliness, and really you will no longer *be able* to imagine me as “well-off,” either in the present or the past.

I say loneliness and not solitude, but that loneliness—which a painter has to bear, who in some unfrequented part, is regarded by everyone as a lunatic, a murderer, a tramp, etc. etc.

Indeed, this may be a small misery, but it is a sorrow after all: A feeling of being outcast—particularly strange and unpleasant—though the country may be ever so stimulating and beautiful.

But for the rest, I only consider it as a bad time, which must be got through, and which one can change but little oneself, that is to say, in the relations with people whom one would love to have as models, but cannot get. Looking back, I see clearly enough now how it came to a misunderstanding between you and me.

There was a moment when you were very melancholy and wrote to me the following: “my employers make the situation almost impossible for me, and I even believe they *would rather dismiss me than let me take my leave*” (the latter exactly my case at the time). And you said some things about the idea of painting at least not being uncongenial to you.

Well—then I told you frankly all my thoughts, about the possibility of your becoming a painter; I said, “you *can do it* if you only want to, and I believe in you *as an artist, from the moment you take up the brush*,” though nobody else might.

But your later letters are so different in tone and contents that now I say: “if your rigged ship is in good order, just stay on it.”

But why I said something about: “if you stay, then I shall refuse your financial support,” referred to your saying: let me stay where I am, for I must provide for those at home and myself (though you did not name me)—a delicacy on your part not to name *me* which I had to repay by a delicacy on my part. I do not want *that*, namely, such a sacrifice of yourself, that you should stay there against your inclination, for the sake of others; that is what you took for an ultimatum from me.

If you stay because “you take a renewed pleasure in it,” all

right then, and I congratulate you on your newly rigged ship, though I for my part do not want to go back to it.

What you wrote me about Serret greatly interests me. Such a man, who finally produces something pathetic as the blossom of a hard and a difficult life, is a wonder, like the black hawthorn, or, better still, the crooked old apple trunk, that at a certain moment bears blossoms, which are among the most delicate and most virginal things under the sun.

*When a rough man bears blossoms like a flowering plant*, yes, that is beautiful to see, but before that time *he* has had to stand a great deal of winter cold, more than those who afterwards sympathize with him know.

The *artist's life*, and *what an artist is*, that is very curious—how deep it is—how infinitely deep.

Because of your unaccountable silence, and because I connected it with perhaps new difficulties on the side of the directors, and because I myself was hopelessly hard pressed, through suspicion of the people at the inn, I wrote a note to father that as I had not heard from you, I did not know what to think of it, and that I begged father to lend me some money. I added that I was anxious both about you, and about myself, especially when thinking of the future, and that I wished that you and I, as boys, had become painters then, and that I didn't see why we two brothers could not be painters as yet.

So if father should write to you about it, you know how it is, but I myself (up till now, I have had no answer from father). I shall write father that your last letter has made it clear to me, that, for the moment G. & Co. remain G. & Co. To you, not to father, I add that Goupil & Co. has an influence on our family, curiously mixed of good and evil, but *at all events*, as it prevents much stagnation, the evil is for the moment not prevalent. That my heart knoweth its own bitterness, is a thing which I think you understand, and in consequence will pardon.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent

Brother, after your last letter, all my worst, vague anxieties are quieted; I mean that I have a perfect confidence in you as a man.

I shall be able to write to you more calmly from home.<sup>1</sup>

There is certainly a field of action for me in Drenthe, but from the very beginning, I must be able to undertake it somewhat differently, and have more security about my finances. I must calculate on a small scale; for now momentarily for instance (I admit of course, it is the first time you quite skipped one term) the difference of 25 guilders, is for me a thing that may perhaps handicap me again for six weeks. I readily believe that you can't imagine this—you *cannot* know how again and again, difficulties, each very small in itself, make a thing possible or impossible. For instance last week, I got a note from my former landlord, who more or less insinuates that he might lay hands on the things I left behind (among which are all my studies, prints, books, which I could hardly do without) if I did not send him the 10 guilders which I had promised him as a payment for the use of a garret for my things, and a debt of the woman, which it was doubtful he had the right to claim, but I yielded, on condition of an arrangement to store my things. About the New Year, I have still other things to pay. I have still to pay Rappard, and I saved all I could. In short, it is just the opposite of feeling myself "in plenty."

As it is now, it *cannot* go on. I must try and find a way.

Of course, I do not say it is your fault, but even last year, I have not been able to save more than I did. And the harder I work, the harder I am pressed. We have now arrived at a point that I say, momentarily I cannot go on.

<sup>1</sup> Apparently he had intended to go for a short time to his parents' house at Nuenen; but he did not go back to Drenthe, and stayed at Nuenen for two years.



## NUENEN

DECEMBER 1883—NOVEMBER 1885

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Dear brother,

Perhaps you were rather astonished when I told you briefly that I intended to go home for a while, and that now I write you from here. But first I have to thank you for your letter of the 1st December, which I just received here at Nuenen.

For the last three weeks already, I did not feel quite well—all kinds of little troubles from having caught cold, and also from nervousness.

One must try to break such a thing, and I felt it would get worse if I did not take a change.

So for several reasons I made up my mind to go home for a while. A thing which, however, I was very loath to do.

My journey began with a good six hours' walk across the heath—to Hoogetveen. On a stormy afternoon in rain and snow.

That walk greatly cheered me up, or rather my feelings were so in sympathy with nature that it calmed me more than anything. I thought that perhaps my going back home might give me a clearer insight in questions of how to act. Drenthe is splendid, but one's being able to stay there depends upon many things, depends upon whether one is able to stand the loneliness. I believe father would reckon that question settled, by a conclusion, drawn from a conversation, but, I for my part, will not hurry to decide it, and, for instance, I must just see what I think of it, after having been here about a week or so. But for the present, I am quite in the dark as to how to act in that respect.

By thinking or speaking about the question, one does by no means arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, that is what I see more and more. At one moment it seems more possible than at another.

And I, for my part, do not drop questions suddenly, but keep

them in mind, sometimes long after other people consider them settled. But, lad, it is so difficult for me, it becomes so much a matter of conscience that I should be too great a burden to you, that I should perhaps abuse your friendship when I accept money for an enterprise which perhaps will not pay.

You write again about the 'Moniteur Universel.'

Do you think my opinion too pessimistic, when I declare it *possible*, that in relatively few years, a number of great art enterprises, like for instance 'de Moniteur Universel'—and others still more widely spread—will dwindle down—will fall in decadence as quickly as they came up? In relatively few years, all art business that remained in touch with real art, began to flourish. But it became too much a money speculation, and is so even now—I do not say *quite*—I simply say *too much* so; in so far as it is speculation why should it not be, as, for instance, with the bulb trade? You will say that a picture is no tulip. Of course there is the widest difference, and of course *I* who love pictures, and tulips not at all, am perfectly well aware of this.

But I am sure that many rich people, who for some reason or other buy expensive pictures, do not do so because of the art value they find in them—for such people the difference which you and I see between a tulip and a picture, is not visible. They, the speculators and "pochards blasés" and many others, would buy tulips now just as formerly, if it were but fashionable.

There are real, serious amateurs, yes, but it is perhaps only a tenth of all business that is transacted, perhaps a much smaller part still, of which can be said that it was really done for love of art. Of course I could go on enlarging on this theme for ever, but without insisting on it further, I think you will agree with me that there is in art trade much which in the future might prove air.

Pictures now raised enormously in price, may go down. If you ask me: Can Millet and Corot go down? *I say: in price, Yes.*

From an artistic point of view of course, Millet is Millet, Corot, Corot, fixed—like the sun itself—in my opinion at least.

Five years ago I thought differently about it, I thought that, for instance, Millet would remain stable *even* in price, but since then—just because I see how generally Millet is entirely misunderstood, since he is less obscure and has become more widely spread in reproduction, for instance, than when he was ignored, I am

afraid he will never be appreciated by the public at large, and—it is not sure that those who understand him most, will later on have to pay so much money for his pictures as they must now. Rembrandt's work also went down *in price*, in the time of the pigtails.

I should like to ask you frankly: do you believe that the prices paid at present will hold? I tell you frankly I do not think *so*.

But at the same time, for me Millet is Millet, Rembrandt is Rembrandt, Israël is Israël, etc., whether their pictures cost twopence or one hundred thousand guilders. In consequence, I do not spend much thought on the art business. I do so only when I think of you, and when I come to ask you if *you really can like it*, if you will not see, especially later, many things that are too distasteful for you to stand. You will say: "one gets used to everything," or rather you will say: "we must live on till our heart breaks within us." May be so, I agree with you in this—but if our heart needs must break within us, we are yet free to act in one way or another. And as to you or me, we are what we are, and as we have enthusiasm for art within us, we would, each in his own way, stick to our opinion about Millet, for instance, even if the most absurd things happened.

But I ask you: in case of a gradual fall of the enormous prices for pictures, how can the great houses make up for it, who yearly spend enormous sums on advances, etc., which must be deducted from their profit—they soon fall into great deficits. Such trees do not fall at the first stroke, but they can moulder away interiorly and fall at last, without one stroke of the axe, only by the wind; when? I do not know the exact date at all.

Just write to me about this question in general, what you think for instance of the steadfastness—in the long run—of an establishment as you say the *Moniteur Universel* is—or *Petit*—or *Arnold & Tripp*. I tell you clearly I do not see how they can keep it up in the long run. I think such things must tumble down.

To assist at such a thing must be rather uncomfortable, I think—I prefer to sit and paint near a peat fire.

For the whole art business, one only feels then a certain "*qu'est ce que ça me fait*"—except—except—that I for my part think it very unpleasant to be too much short of money.

You always remained your own calm self in Paris, very simple, and certainly cooler than for instance a man like *Tripp*.

You only care to see things as they are, you, as well as I, *cannot* keep from analysing. And yet *even* you do not use your knowledge of a situation, in the first place to profit by, in spite of difficulties.

I mean fishing in troubled water is not in your character.

But I ask you frankly, how is it? do you really believe the Moniteur Universel will ask anything else of their employées than G. & Co. does? The Moniteur, G. & Co., Tripp, Petit, to me they are all alike. I myself, believe that having been thrust out of one, I should be thrust out of all. If old Mr. Goupil says: you are not the man for us, I believe other managers would think the same.

Do you have confidence in the present times, do you believe trade will remain at this high pitch?

Do write to me about this, it will be so much easier then for me to speak about it. I feel a little embarrassed towards you just now, and I want you to know my perhaps exaggerated opinion that, in the first place, I do not believe those high blown affairs will keep, and in the second place, though they might keep, I should not like to take part in them either directly or indirectly.

Another question is, if I can provide for myself by doing anything here or there, I will not look such a gift horse in the mouth.

If it proves my duty to do something or other, very well, I will not refuse the work, even disagreeable work.

I thought of you, brother, during that long walk across the heath, in the evening, in the storm. I thought of a passage, I don't know from what book: "*deux yeux éclaircies par de vraies larmes veilleraient.*" I thought: *I am disillusioned*. I thought: *I have believed in many things, which I now know to be melancholy at bottom—I thought: those eyes of mine, here on that gloomy evening, wide awake in the loneliness, if, at times they have been full of tears, why should not these have been wrung from me by a sorrow that disenchant—yes—and disturbs illusions—but at the same time—makes wide awake.*

I thought: *is it possible* that Theo is satisfied with many things that worry me?

Is it possible that it is only a fit of melancholy of mine, when I cannot enjoy some things as I used to do?

In short, I thought: is it possible that I take gold for tinsel? Do I call withered, a thing that is in full bloom? I could not give myself an answer, can you? Are you sure that there is not every-

where a far advanced, inexorable decadence. Give me courage, if you have courage yourself, but I ask you in my turn: "do not flatter me."

I declare I believe about myself, that even if I became very clever (what I am not as yet) I believe—firmly believe, that I shall always be very poor, that it will be more than I expect, if I succeed in keeping out of debt. That a time in which the prices are run up so high, draws bills as it were on the future, which makes the future dark for posterity, is one of the drawbacks of a period like that which is drawing near. You, who are as clever, as for instance Uncle Vincent, will not be able to do what Uncle Vincent did—why not?—because there are too many Arnolds and Tripps in the world. Insatiable money-wolves, compared to whom you are but a sheep. Please do not take it as an insult, brother, that I make this comparison, it is better to be a sheep than a wolf, better to be slain than to slay—better to be Abel than Cain. And, and—I hope, or rather I am sure, that I am no wolf either. Suppose you and I are not only in our imagination, but really like sheep among our fellow-creatures. All right—granting the existence of rather hungry and false wolves, it would not be impossible that we should be devoured some day.

Well, this may not be so very agreeable, but I say to myself: In fine, it is, after all, better to be ruined than to ruin somebody else. I mean there is no reason to lose one's serenity, if one should realize that one might have to lead a poor life, even possessing all the qualities, the knowledge, the capacities, which make other people rich. I am not indifferent to money, but I do not understand the wolves. Well, with a hearty handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

If you like, do give me an answer to some of these questions while I am here at home, I am here to get some rest, and to arrive at some decision.

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Dear Theo,

I was lying awake half the night, Theo, after I wrote you last night.

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I am sick at heart about the fact that, coming back after two years' absence, the welcome home was in every respect kind and cordial, but at bottom, there is not the least, least change whatever, in that what I must call blindness and ignorance, in the most extreme degree, as to the insight in our mutual position. And I feel again almost unbearably disturbed and perplexed.

You understand that I would not write as I do—having undertaken the journey hither of my own free will, having been the first to bend my pride—if I did not find real obstacles in my way.

If I now had noticed some eagerness to do as the Rappards have done, with the best results and as we began here also with good results, if I had noticed that father also had realized that he ought *not* to have shut his house to me, then I would have felt some confidence in the future.

Nothing, nothing, of all that.

Their cordial reception grieves me—their *yielding* without acknowledging their mistake, is, for me, perhaps worse than the mistake itself.—Instead of a ready understanding, and contributing with a certain eagerness to my, and indirectly their own, well-being, I feel in everything a hesitation and delay, that lame my own ardour and energy, like a leaden atmosphere.

Do you call this moroseness on my part?

Our life is an appalling reality, and we ourselves are driven on infinitely, things are—as they are—and whether we take them more or less gloomily, does not in any way alter the nature of things. I think about it like this for instance at night when I lie awake, or I think about it like this in the storm on the heath, in the evening, in the dreary twilight.

In daytime, in ordinary life, I sometimes look perhaps as hard skinned as a wild boar, and I can perfectly well understand that people think me *coarse*. When I was younger, I thought much more than now, that things depended on chance, on small things or misunderstandings that had no reason. But getting older, I feel it more and more differently, and see deeper motives. Life is “a queer thing” too, brother.

You see how agitated my letters are, one moment I think *it can be done*, the next, *it cannot*. One thing is clear to me, “that things don’t go readily, that there is no eagerness.”

I have decided to go and see Rappard. . . . Damn it, brother, the

Rappards acted intelligently, but here ! ! ! ! ! And everything you did for it, and do still, becomes for three-quarters useless by their fault. It is stupid, brother. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I don't care so much for a friendly or unfriendly reception, it hurts me that they are not sorry for what they did then.

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Dear brother,

I feel how father and mother *instinctively* (I do not say *sensibly*) think about me.

They feel the same dread about taking me in the house, as they would about taking a big rough dog. He would run into the room with wet paws—and he is so rough. He will be in everybody's way. *And he barks so loud.* In short, he is a dirty beast.

All right—but the beast has a human history, and though but a dog, he has a human soul, and even a very sensitive one, that makes him feel how people think of him, what an ordinary dog cannot do.

And I, admitting that I am a kind of dog, rate them at their own value.

The dog feels that if they kept him, it would only be putting up with him, and tolerating him "*in this house*," so he will try to find another kennel. The dog is in fact father's son, and has been left rather too much in the street, where he could not but become more and more rough, but as father has forgotten that already years ago, one need not mention that.

And then—the dog might bite—he might go mad, and the constable would have to come to shoot him.

Yes, all that is very true.

On the other hand, dogs are guardians.

But that is superfluous, there is peace, and there is no question of any danger, they say. So I keep silent about it.

The dog is only sorry that he did not keep away, for it was not so lonely on the heath, as in this house, notwithstanding all kind-

ness. The dog's visit was a weakness, which I hope will be forgotten, and which he will avoid to commit in the future.

As I have had no expenses since I am here, and as I received twice, money from you, I have paid the journey myself, and also paid for the clothes father bought, because mine were not good enough, and, at the same time, I returned the 25 guilders to friend Rappard.

I think you will be glad about this, it seemed so careless.

Dear Theo, enclosed you will find the letter I was writing when I received yours, which I will answer now, after having read carefully what you say.

I begin by saying, I think it noble of you, that, thinking I *hurt* father, you take his part, and give me a good scolding.

I appreciate this in you, though you are fighting against somebody who is neither father's nor your own enemy; there is in father and in you and in me a desire for peace and reconciliation. And yet we do not seem able to bring about peace.

Now, I believe that I am the stumbling-block, and so I must try to find a way not to "*bother*" you or father any longer. So you think too that I hurt father's feelings and that I am a *coward*. *So*. Well, in the future I will try to keep everything to myself, I shall not visit father again, and shall stick to my proposition of putting a stop to our arrangement about the money, towards March, if you agree, in order to keep on both sides our freedom of thought, in order not to *bother* you any longer. I keep some space of time for the sake of order, and to allow myself some time for taking a few measures, which, though they have very little chance of success, I may not put off for conscience' sake. You must take this calmly and in kindness, brother—it is not an ultimatum I send you. But if our feelings differ too widely, we must not force ourselves not to call things by their names. Is not that your opinion too?

But you know, don't you, that I consider you *to have saved my life*. I shall *never* forget that; *though we put an end* to relations which I am afraid would bring us in a false position, I am not only your brother, your friend, but at the same time, I have *infinite* obligations to you of gratitude for the fact of your having reached me a helping hand at the time, and having continued to help me. Money can be repaid, not kindness such as yours.

Let me go my own way—but it is a disappointment to me that

there has not been a thorough reconciliation now, but I wish it could happen as yet, but you people do not understand me, and I am afraid, perhaps you *never* will.

Send me the usual amount by return of mail if possible, then I need not ask father for anything when I go away, what I must do as soon as possible. The fr. 23.80 of the 1st December I gave in full to father, for fr. 14 borrowed, and shoes and drawers.

The fr. 25 of the 10th December, I gave in full to Rappard.

I have in my pocket just sixpence and a few pence. That is the account, which you will understand now, if you know besides, that from the money of the 20th November, which arrived the 1st December, I paid my expenses in Drenthe for a long time because there had been some delay then that was set to rights afterwards, and from the fr. 14 (which I borrowed from father and gave back since) I paid my journey, etc.

I go from here to Rappard.

And from Rappard perhaps to Mauve.

So my proposition is to try and arrange everything in calmness and order. And, brother, even if there may come a separation or whatever it may be, I am your friend perhaps *much more than you know or guess*. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

347

Dear Theo,

Mauve once said to me: "you will find yourself, if you go on painting, if you penetrate deeper in art than you have done till now," he said so two years ago.

Of late I often think about these words of his.

I have found myself—I am that dog.

This idea may be a little exaggerated—reality may be less pronounced in its contrasts, less absolutely dramatic, but, after all, the rough outline of character is true I believe. The shaggy shepherd's dog, which I tried to describe to you in my letter of yesterday, it is my character, and the life of that animal is my life, that is to say, omitting the details and only marking the essentials.

This may seem exaggerated to you—but I do not take it back. Without being personal, just for the sake of the study of character, impartial, as if I did not speak about you and me but about strangers, for the sake of analysis, I point out to you once more how it was last summer. I see two brothers walking through the Hague; (*consider them like strangers*, do not think of yourself and me). One says: “I must keep up a certain standing, I must stay in business, I don’t think I will become a painter.”

The other says: “I become like a dog, I feel that the future will probably make me more ugly and rough, and I foresee that ‘a certain *poverty*’ will be my fate, but, but *I shall be a painter*.”

So the one—a certain standing as an art dealer.

The other—poverty and painter.

And I see those same brothers in former years, when you had just entered the world of pictures, when you just began to read, etc., etc.—I see them near the mill of Ryswyk or for instance on a walk in winter to Chaam across the snowy heath early in the morning! *Feeling, thinking and believing* so exactly alike, that I ask myself: are those the same??? The question is: how will things turn out—will they separate for ever, or will they follow for ever the same path? Will it ever turn out to be something better than the time of the Ryswyk mill, that is to say: two poor brothers artists—wrapped up in one same feeling for one same nature and art?

Look here, I have thought it over for four years more than you, I am four years older and calmer—time and experience have taught me to avoid and leave alone certain things, and I do not want to influence you, but I will not hide myself from you or speak otherwise than frankly. I come to the following conclusion. That what was shown to me formerly as *duty*, was a *spectre* of duty. They said more or less (not so much in words): “earn money and your life will be straight.” Millet says to me: “*Make your life straight*, (try at least to make it so, and try to wrestle with the naked truth) and *even* the earning of money will come in due course, and you will not become dishonest.”

Neither father nor Tersteeg has given me rest for my conscience other than delusive, and they have not freed me, have not even approved of my want of freedom, and of plain truth, and my feeling of ignorance and darkness.



Now left to myself, I have not yet attained light, and that what I want, I grant it, but since I have flatly rejected their systems, I have a certain hope that my aspirations will not be vain, and that I shall see the white radiance before my eyes close.

Whatever soul's anguish I may have had about my failures, I have never regretted having said that I found the darkness black and that I have avoided it. All the influences of the past separated me more and more from nature. Whatever there may be of Millet, he has brought me back to nature, at least more than anybody else could have done in my desperate condition.

My youth has been gloomy and cold and sterile under the influence of the darkness—and, brother, your youth in fact too, lad. Well, I will reproach for this nobody but myself. But the darkness is unutterably cruel—unutterably. And at this moment I feel as many repressed tears about many things as there are in a figure of Mantegna.

But, brother, my very sorrow about many things, proves to me that I have broken *for ever* with those systems in question. I have suffered from them, but, after all, I stand no longer at that side.

Now I say to you as brother to brother, as friend to friend: though our youth has been gloomy and cramped, *for the future* let us try to find that soft light, for which I know no better name, than the white radiance or the good. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Since I wrote the enclosed letter, I have again thought over your remarks, and have again spoken with father. My decision not to stay here was almost taken, no matter what they might think about it, or what might be the consequences; but then the conversation took another turn, by my saying: "I am here now since two weeks, and do not feel a bit more advanced than the first half-hour, now if we had understood each other better, we would have things in order, and arranged by now—I have no time to lose, and I must take a decision. A door must be either open or closed. Anything between the two I do not understand, and does not really exist in fact."

So the result is, that the little room at home where the mangle

stands, will be at my disposal to put away my things, to use as studio too, in case this might be necessary.

And they have now begun to clear out the room, which had been put off while things were still undecided.

I can tell you one thing, which I see better now than when I wrote you about father. I am softened in my opinion; I respect old age and its weakness as *you* do, though it may not seem so to you, though you do not believe this from me.

I also thought of the word of Michelet (who learned it from a scientist) "*le mâle est très sauvage.*" And as at this period of my life, I know myself to have strong passions, which I think it is right to have—I look upon myself as being indeed "*a savage.*" And yet my passion abates, when I stand before a weaker one, and I do not fight then. . . .

Since I know that our thoughts crossed each other, when we were first at G. & Co.'s, that is to say, that both you and I then thought of becoming a painter, but so secretly that we did not dare say it even to each other, it might happen that now in later years, we should become more united

I forced myself so hard at that time, and was so much oppressed by a prejudice that I certainly was no painter that, *even* when I left Goupil's, I did not fix on art, but turned to another thing, (which was a second mistake added to the first), being then discouraged about its possibility, because timid, very timid advances, made to a few painters, were not even noticed.

That what I tell you is not because I want *to force* you to think as I do, I only tell it you in brotherly, in friendly confidence.

My views may sometimes be out of proportion, that may be, but I believe there *must* be some truth in their character, and action, and direction.

That I myself tried to get father to take me in again, even to have a studio here, it was not done in the first or principal place out of egotism. I see in it that, though we do not understand each other in many things, there will be, either always, or by fits, goodwill to harmonize between you, father and myself. As the estrangement between us has lasted so long already, it can do no harm to try and put some weight on the other side, so that, in the eyes of the world, we shall not appear more divided than really is the case, so that, in the eyes of the world, we shall not fall into extremes.

Rappard says to me: "a man is not a lump of peat, in so far that he cannot bear to be flung away in an attic, and be forgotten there"—and he insists that he thinks it a great misfortune for me, that I could not live at home.—Just think this over please.

I think it has been taken rather too much for granted that I acted wilfully or recklessly, well you know it better than I do, while in reality, I rather was forced to some things, and could not act differently. And the very method taken to accuse me of base aims, made me very cool, and rather indifferent to many people.

Brother, I repeat—reflect deeply at this time of your life, I think you will have to verify the perspective of your life over again. I do not say so as if I know it, and you do not, I say it, because I begin to see more and more how terribly difficult it is to know where one is right or where one is wrong.

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Dear Theo,

I received your letter to-day, and also by the same mail one from friend Rappard.

Let me begin by thanking you for the money.

And let me add at once that I appreciate that both you and Rappard approve of my coming here. This gave me courage at a moment that I myself was hopelessly discouraged, about the fact of my coming here, and was bitterly regretting it.

But your letter and a very intelligent, very kind, very cordial letter from friend Rappard, and both your opinions, that my journey hither might bring about some good, have induced me not to consider the case as lost as yet, but to practise patience and wisdom.

Have patience with me, brother, and do not suspect me of ill-will. You will point out to me what I know full well myself, that in many respects, I personally am very difficult to deal with. Yes, that is true, and I have to count with it too. There is an excuse for me, and that is the passion, and the frequent absorbedness, which everyone who paints, writes, or composes, must needs have.

But now to-day, I receive your letter, and, at the same time, a letter from Rappard, written in a tone which I can understand and

appreciate. And having talked it over once more with father, we arrive at a provisional arrangement and calmness.

I have proposed that the room that can most easily be spared shall be used to keep my things in, and eventually as a studio, in case not only *I* but *you and I*, think it necessary and fit, that I shall work at home for a time, especially when there are financial reasons to force us to it. Business is business, and to you and to me, it is clear enough that this is a good arrangement.

I have been without this resting point too long, and I think that it must be settled in this way, if we want to succeed in our undertaking.

I believe it is possible, and I shall have the courage to start it, when you and I agree that we must carry it through, and settle that you will not be vexed with me, if, in case of some disagreement with father, I do not take it so seriously as I did two years ago.

I will quietly go my own way, and follow your advice *not* to speak with father about several things, if I only then find in you the person to whom I *can* speak about them, and to whom I can say: I should like to do this or that, for this or that reason.

I can tell you now, that I have succeeded in getting father's permission to fix up a room here.

If you approve of it, *this will become my fixed storeroom and my studio, in times when we have no money to be elsewhere*. And about further arrangements and business, I will not speak first with father but with you.

I think you will approve of my having insisted on getting some fixed arrangement. I think it *decidedly a good thing* that I shall have a studio here (though I shall not always be in that studio).

So let us stick to that, and let this letter, and not the former one, be our starting-point. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

It struck me, Theo, that friend Rappard writes to me, *now*, how he noticed a change in me that summer in Etten (it was when I met her).

And at the same time, he indicates how he understands *something* happened then, though *he does not know what*. And he seems to ask, is it coming right after all ?

Dear Theo,

The Hague.

I am writing a line to tell you that on account of the arrangement with father and mother, to let me use the present laundry room for a studio and storing place for my things, I went to the Hague to pack up and send off my studies, prints, etc. etc. A thing I must attend to myself.

I also spent the day with Rappard, who was very cordial, and rather reassured me, as to some scruples I had regarding the possible duration of the arrangement.

Well, I saw drawings (water-colours), and painted studies of his, which I found *very good*.

Especially those of the workhouse at Terschelling. What a change you would find in his work.—

I have seen the woman again, a thing I had greatly longed for.

I feel indeed, that it would be difficult to begin anew. But for all that, I do not want to act as if I have entirely forgotten her.

And I wish that father and mother might realize that pity is not limited in the way the world thinks. You were the one to understand me in this matter. She has behaved bravely under the circumstances, a reason for me to forget the difficulties I had with her at times. And just because I can hardly do anything for her now. I must at least try to encourage and to strengthen her.

I see in her a woman, I see in her a mother, and I think every man who has the least manliness in him, must protect such an one, if there is an occasion for doing so. I have never been ashamed of it, nor ever shall be.

Well, I write in a hurry. A handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

My address is: Kosthuis No. 1.

Assendelftstraat 16.

But of course I shall not stay here long.



Dear Theo,

Last night I came back to Nuenen, and I must tell you at once what I have on my heart.

I packed my painting materials, studies, etc., at the Hague, and sent them here, and father and mother having cleared the little room, I am already settled in that new studio, where I hope I shall be able to make some progress. Then I must tell you that I have seen the woman, and that we have decided more definitely than ever to live apart, at least so that the world cannot make any just observations about it.

Once separated, we remain so, but, after all, we regret not having chosen a middle course, and even now an attachment remains that has rooted too deeply to pass away. . . .

I can tell you that the woman has behaved well, *has worked* as a washerwoman to earn a living for herself and the children, so that she has done her duty, notwithstanding great physical weakness.

You know that I took her in my house because, at her confinement, things had happened which made the doctor in Leyden advise her to stay in some quiet place, for her own sake and that of the baby.

There was anæmia, and perhaps a beginning of consumption; well, as long as I was with her, she did not grow worse, but in many respects stronger, so that several ugly symptoms disappeared.

But now everything has changed for the worse, and I fear for her life, and the poor little baby too, which I cared for as if it were my own, is no longer what it was.

Brother, I found her in great misery, and I am in great sorrow about her. I know, of course, that it is greatly my own fault, but you too might have spoken differently.

Now that it is too late, I understand better some fits of temper in her, and some things which I thought she did wrong on purpose, I see now as nervous symptoms, done almost unconsciously.

Just as she told me on more than one occasion afterwards: "*sometimes I do not know what I do.*"

For me, as well as for you, there is an excuse in the fact that one does not know in how far such a woman can be relied upon, and besides in the financial obstacles—but we ought rather to have

chosen a middle course, and if we could still find it—though it will be difficult to find now—it would be more humane and less cruel. However, I did not want to give her hope, and I have encouraged her and tried to comfort and strengthen her *on the path on which she goes now*, living alone, working for herself and her children. But my heart goes out to her, in the same great pity as it used to do, a pity which has been alive in me all these last months, even after our separation. I do not say there was no need of a change or a modification, but—I think we, or rather I, have gone too far.

As to my opinion how far one *may* go in a case of helping a poor, forsaken, sick creature, I can only repeat what I told you already on a former occasion: *infinitely*.

On the other hand, our cruelty can be infinite, too.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

It is a sad letter at the end of this year—for me, sad to write, for you, to receive, but for the poor woman it is still worse.

I have again heard from her, for I sent her to a doctor, and she told me the result of that visit.

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Dear Theo,

I have still to thank you for your letter of the 1st January, and the enclosure. . . .

As to what you say that I might perhaps become quite isolated, I do not say that this might not happen, I expect little else, and shall be content if life remains tolerable and bearable for me.

But I declare to you, I should not consider this a fate I deserve, for I believe that, after all, I have never done, or shall ever do, anything to make me lose the right of feeling myself one with my fellow-creatures.

For a great part, others would be to blame for that too. Well, I try to consider myself as if I were somebody else, that is to say, objectively, so that I try to see my own mistakes, as well as perhaps their opposite. And I know several stories of men who had

to live relatively very isolated, just because *neither of the parties* found them exactly as they wanted them to be.

Isolation is bad enough, it is a kind of prison. To what extent I shall become so cannot perhaps be exactly said as yet. Nor do you say so, in fact.

I for my part often prefer to be with people who do *not even know* the world, for instance the peasants, the weavers, etc., rather than with those from the more civilized world. That's lucky for me.

So for instance since I am here, I have been absorbed in the weavers.

Do you know many drawings of weavers? I know only very few. I began by making three water-colours of them.

Those people are very hard to draw, because in those small rooms one cannot take enough distance to draw the loom. I think that is the reason why so many drawings become failures. But I have found a room here where two looms are, and where it can be done.

Rappard has painted in Drenthe a study of it, which I like very much. It is very gloomy—they are but poor creatures, those weavers. I have also made a drawing, just an impression of an auction of timber.

I wish you could understand that, if at times I wish you to have other thoughts about some questions than you have at present, I do so only because I believe you would fare better by it, and not because I should want to make a proselyte for *my own opinions*. I do not believe my opinions to be better than those of other people. But I begin to believe, more and more, that there is a thing, compared to which *all* opinions, so mine too, become as nothing.

Certain truths and facts, which our opinions can change little or nothing, and which I hope not to mistake for my or other people's opinions, what would be an error on my part.

As little as the weathercocks can change the direction of the wind, so little can opinions change certain standard truths. The weathercocks do not make the wind east or north, neither can opinions make the truth true.

There are things as old as humanity itself, and which will not disappear as yet.

I know an old legend, I don't know of what people, which I

love, of course it did not happen literally, but it is a symbol of many things. In that story, it is said that the human race descends from two brothers.

These two were allowed to choose what they wanted above all things. The one chose gold, and the other chose the book.

The first who had chosen the gold became prosperous, but the second one fared badly.

The legend—without exactly explaining why—tells how the man with the book got banished to a cold and miserable country, and got *isolated*. But in his misery, he began to read that book, and he learned things from it. So he managed to make his life more bearable, and invented several things to get out of his difficulties, so that at last he acquired a certain power, but always by working and struggling.

Then afterwards, just when he got stronger by the help of the book, the first one grew weaker, and so he lived long enough to learn that gold is *not the* axis round which *everything* turned.

It is but a legend, but for me there is a depth in it which I find true.

“The book,” that does not mean *all* books or literature, it is, at the same time, conscience, reason, and it is art.

Gold, that does not stand only for money, but it is at the same time, an image of several other things.

But do not suppose that I want to force anything in this respect, these things must prove themselves.

And for the rest, whether isolated or not, I will try to manage so that I can work on; and as to my opinions—I sometimes think of what Taine says: “Il me semble que pour ce qui est du travailleur personnellement, il peut garder ça pour soi,” so it was probably a mistake on my part that I did not keep things to myself in short. And know it well, that I do not want you to consider the help you give me, as a thing which you are obliged to do, for you were not obliged to do it in the past, nor are you now, it has been a voluntary thing on your part, for which *I*, for my part, feel a real *obligation to you*, and I repeat, shall certainly always feel so.

Wishing you success in your business.

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear brother,

(17th January '84.)

I must just tell you something that has happened.

On getting out of the train at Helmond, mother hurt her leg.

Father says, the doctor told him, it was a decided fracture, near the pelvis of the hip joint.

I assisted at the setting, which came off comparatively well, so that I am almost inclined to think it more a dislocation.

The doctor assures us there is no real danger, but considering mother's age, it will take a long time.

I wanted to tell you the exact truth, supposing you would prefer that. But I give you my word of honour, that it is not worse than I tell you. For the present I will let you hear every day. By the same mail, I write to your address Rue de Laval, so that you may hear it as soon as possible, either at home, or at your office. Tomorrow I will write again as soon as the doctor has been. It is a great misfortune indeed.

I was painting at the farm when they sent for me.

Mother lies quietly now. Good-bye, lad. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

According to my promise, I write to you again, now that the doctor has been. The first night has been very quiet, and as much depends on quiet, the doctor was very satisfied.

We asked him again positively what it was, and it is a fact that the thigh-bone has been broken right beneath the joint.

You know that I was just going to pay off some debts with the money you sent. But as there will be many extra expenses, of course I told father he was welcome to use it, the other things can wait, and it was by chance, I had not yet sent it off. I am afraid



it will be a long time, before mother recovers. With a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

*Saturday morning.*

I can tell you that the last night has also passed quietly, and mother has slept pretty well. She sends you her love. But it will last some time, brother, before everything is all right again.

Theo, think it over well, if you cannot find out some way or other for me to earn something. Money will be needed, and we must also consider once more the chances of selling my work. If it were only so that I could pay the expenses of my work myself, that you could give to mother what you otherwise give to me.

I told you already, I am making water-colours of the weavers here. I will try to finish some. But I cannot give all my time to them, and I must be at home as much as possible, at least these first days. Well, as soon as the doctor has been again to-day I will send you a postcard. Good-bye.

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Dear Theo,

Up till now mother is pretty well, in so far that the leg remains in its bandage as it was set.

But for all that the days are rather gloomy. And I am afraid lying still will become more and more difficult for mother.

We have just been talking over your letter, in which you write you intend to come.

Of course it would be a great joy for mother to see you, but, on the other hand, there is something one must be careful about. And that is the parting, when you would have to go back.

And then it *might* be that if you came mother might take it as a sign that she is very bad.

But it is a fact, mother would be very glad if you came.

I write about that coming, because, in case you should do so, I should think it better *not to surprise her*, but to write about it to mother first.

If, unluckily, there might be a change for the worse, we would wire you at once, you may always depend upon it. Of course, your coming or not is a question which can absolutely only be decided by yourself. Decided and direct danger there is none, but it is impossible to know how things will continue. I suppose father has written you all details, and he will write you again one of these days.

I have no head for writing now, and I have little time for it, for when I am not with mother, I am near by at the weavers, where I have two painted studies on hand.

Write soon again. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I was glad to get your letter of to-day, and the enclosure, and thank you very much for both.

It seems to me, that up to now, mother's recovery in general goes fairly well. And that there is less and less *direct* danger, and that it is more and more reduced to a question of time.

Under the circumstances, I was glad to be at home, and, as the present accident has quite pushed to the background some questions (in which I differ from father and mother), we get on pretty well, and the result may be that, for the future, I shall stay more and longer at Nuenen than I thought possible at first. As a matter of course, I shall be able to lend a helping hand, especially later on, when mother will have to be moved more often, etc.

Since the panic of the first days has calmed down a little, I can do my work pretty regularly.

I am busy *painting* every day studies of the weavers here, which I think are technically better than the painted studies from Drenthe, which I sent you.

Those subjects of the looms, with their relatively complicated machinery, with a figure sitting in the middle, will lend themselves also for pen drawings, I think, and I will make some, according to the hint you gave me in your letter.

*Before* the accident happened, I had settled with father that I should have free board and lodging here for some time, so that I might use your money to pay off some bills at the beginning of the year. And the money you sent at New Year, and about the middle of January, was lying ready for that. But as I gave it to father when the accident happened, it will be this time the turn of those colour bills.

So, as far as the money goes, I have not profited by being here. And I am firmly resolved to carry on the work vigorously.

It is difficult to say beforehand how the constant lying still will influence mother's health.

All precautions we can take to prevent bed sores are, of course, of the greatest importance. We have made a kind of stretcher, to move mother if necessary, but the less it happens at present the better. For her to lie quietly is the most important thing.



Taking into consideration her difficult position, I am glad to say mother's spirits are very even and bright. And she is amused by trifles. The other day I painted for her the little church with the hedge and the trees (like this).

You will easily understand that I love the scenery here. Whenever you come, I shall take you in the cottages of the weavers. The figures of the weavers, and the women who wind the thread, will certainly strike you.

The last study I made is the figure of a man who sits at the loom, the figure apart, the bust and hands.

I am painting a loom of old, greenish, browned oak, in which the date 1730 is cut. Near that loom, before a little window which looks out on a green plot, stands a baby-chair, and a baby in it sits looking for hours at the flying to and fro of the shuttle.

I have painted that thing exactly as it was in nature, the loom with the little weaver, the little window, and the baby-chair, in the miserable little room, with clay floor.

Please write me some more details about the Manet exhibition;

tell me which of his pictures are there. I have always found Manet's work very original. Do you know that article of Zola's on Manet? I am sorry to have seen but so very few of his pictures. I should like especially to see his nude women figures. I do not think it exaggerated that some people, for instance Zola, *rave* about him, although I, for my part, do not think he can be reckoned among the very first of this century. But his is a talent which *certainly* has its *raison d'être* and that is already a great thing. The article which Zola wrote about him is published in the volume "Mes Haines." I, for my part, cannot agree with Zola's *conclusions*, as if Manet were a man who opens a new future to modern ideas of art; I consider not Manet but *Millet* to be that essential modern painter, who opened a new horizon to many. Good-bye. With a handshake in thought,

Yours,

Vincent.

Love from all. *Write to mother as often as you can*, letters are such a distraction.

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(Postcard.)

Dear Theo,

(13th February.)

To-day I send to you by parcel post three little panels and nine water-colours. Please acknowledge receipt and tell me if there is anything among them which pleases you much better. Mother is about the same. I am painting some more weavers which you will get afterwards.

Good-bye.

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Just a word to tell you—that partly as a result of your letter, in which you mention pen and ink drawings—I can send you five weavers, which I drew after my painted studies, and which are a

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little different—and I think more vigorous of technique, than the pen drawings you saw from me till now. I am working at them early and late, for except the painted studies, and the pen and ink drawings, I have also some new water-colours of them on the easel.

My thoughts have been with you often of late, partly owing to a little book that comes from you and which I borrowed from L.—Poems by François Coppeé. I knew but very few of them, and they had already greatly struck me at the time.

He is one of the true artists—"qui y mettent leur peau"—which is evident from more than one pathetic confession. Artist the more, because he finds his inspiration in so many very diverse things, and can paint a third class waiting-room, full of emigrants that pass the night there—everything grey and gloomy and melancholy—and in another mood, draws a little marquise dancing a minuet, as elegant as a little figure by Watteau.

That losing oneself in the present—that being quite carried away and inspired by the surroundings in which one chances to be—how can one help it? And even if one could resist it at will, of what use would it be, why should not one yield to what lies at hand, this being *après tout*, the surest way to create something.

I was struck by the last poem in the book, called: "Désir dans le spleen," which I copy to recall it to you:

Tout vit, tout aime, et moi, triste et seul, je me dresse  
Ainsi qu'un arbre mort sur le ciel de printemps,  
Je ne peux plus aimer, moi qui n'ai que trente ans,  
Et je viens de quitter sans regrets ma maîtresse.

Je suis comme un malade aux pensers assoupis,  
Et qui, plein de l'ennui de sa chambre banale,  
N'a pour distraction stupide et machinale,  
Que de compter des yeux les fleurs de son tapis.

Je voudrais quelquefois que ma fin fût prochaine,  
Et tous ces souvenirs—jadis délicieux,  
Je les repousse, ainsi qu'on détourne les yeux  
Du portrait d'un aïeul, dont le regard vous gêne.



Même du vieil amour, qui m'a fait tant pleurer,  
Plus de trace en ce cœur, blasé de toute chose.

O figure voilée et vague en mes pensées  
Rencontre de demain que je ne connais pas,  
Courtisane accoudée aux débris d'un repas,  
Ou—femme sérieuse, aux pâles paupières baissées,

Parais!—Si ti peux encore électriser  
Ce misérable cœur sans désir et sans flamme,  
Me rendre l'infini dans un regard de femme  
Et toute la nature en fleur dans un baiser,

Viens—comme les marins d'un navire en détresse  
Jettent, pour vivre une heure, un trésor dans la mer,  
Viens—je te promets tout, âme et cœur, sang et chair,  
Tout—pour un seul instant de croyance—ou d'ivresse.

And then this:

*Douleur bercée.*

Toi que j'ai vu pareil au chêne foudroyé,  
Je te retrouve époux, je te retrouve père,  
Et sur ce front, songeant à la mort qui libère,  
Jadis le pistolet pourtant s'est appuyé.

Tu ne peux pas l'avoir tout-à-fait oublié,  
Tu savais comme on souffre et comme on désespère,  
Tu portais dans ton cœur l'inférieure vipère  
D'un grand amour perdu—d'un grand espoir—broyé.

Sans y trouver l'oubli, tu cherchas les tumultes,  
L'orgie et ses chansons—la gloire et ses insultes,  
Et les longues clameurs de la mer et du vent.

Qui donc à ta douleur imposa le silence?  
O solitaire—il a suffi de la cadence,  
Que marque le berceau d'un petit enfant.

And then this:

*Blessure rouverte.*

O mon cœur, es tu donc si débile et si lâche,  
Et serais tu pareil au forçât qu'on relâche,  
Et qui boite toujours de son boulet traîné?  
Tais-toi, car tu sais bien qu'elle t'a condamné.  
Je ne veux plus souffrir et je t'en donne l'ordre,  
Si je sens encore te gonfler et te tordre,  
Je veux—dans un sanglot contenu—te broyer;  
Et, l'on n'en saura rien—et, pour ne pas crier,  
On me verra—pendant l'effroyable minute  
Serrer les dents—ainsi qu'un soldat qu'on ampute.

Sure this is poetry, and of the best.

"Désir dans le spleen," especially I think so true, it paints how, in those very souls that are exhausted and on the verge of dropping down, there arises at moments that infinite renewal of desire, as if they had no past behind them. I thought of Rembrandt's "Jewish Bride," and what Thoré says of it. Thoré in his best time, and Theo Gautier and so many others—how things are changed since then—and how much duller everything has become. If one wants to keep some of the sacred fire, one must show it as little as possible to others nowadays in short.

Did you receive the parcel I sent you last week? I must keep the pen and ink drawings here for another week, because I need them to finish other things which I started at the same time.

However, you will receive them soon, but please let me know if the parcel arrived all right, and if it was sufficiently stamped.

Because drawings count, perhaps as manuscripts, more may be due for them.

Good-bye, I hope you will be able to find some use for them.

Yours,

Vincent.

Father wrote you a few days ago about mother, since then all is well, and the doctor said to-day that, at first, he had not dared to hope that all would go so favourably.

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter—mother is getting on well; the doctor said at first, it would take half a year before the leg would be cured, *now* he speaks of three months.

Just listen—after having read your letter about the drawings, I sent you at once a new water-colour of a weaver, and five pen drawings. For my part, I will tell you also frankly that I think it true what you say, that my work must become much better still, but at the same time, that your energy to sell them for me, may become somewhat firmer too.

You have *never sold a single one for me*—neither for much nor little—and in fact *you did not even try*.

You see, I am not *angry* about it, but—we must call things by their names. In the long run, I would certainly not put up with that.

You, for your part, can also continue to speak out frankly.

As to being saleable or unsaleable that is an old file, on which I do not intend to blunt my teeth. Well, you see my answer is that I send you some new ones, and very willingly I will go on doing so—I ask no better.

But I insist on your speaking out quite frankly—that is what I like best—whether in the future you intend to interest yourself in them, or whether your dignity does not allow it. Leaving the past for what it was, I must face the future, and apart from what you think about it, I decidedly intend to try and sell them. I must make my own way, Theo, and with you, I am exactly as far as I was a few years ago; what you say about my work now “it is almost saleable, *but*” is *literally the same what you wrote to me when I sent you my first Brabant sketches from Etten*.

So I repeat, that is an old file, and my conclusion is that I suppose you will always say the same thing—and that I, who, till now, was systematically wary of trying my luck with dealers, will change my tactics now, and try hard to get my work sold.

I have now painted the little old church and another weaver. Are those studies from Drenthe so very bad then? I do not feel much animation to send you the painted studies from here, no, we will just leave them where they are—you can see them when you perhaps come here in spring.

Yes—what must I conclude from what you say about my work; for instance let me take the studies from Drenthe—there are some that are very superficial, that is what I said myself; but what do you reproach me for those that are painted simply and quietly from nature, trying *to say nothing but what I saw*. You say: “doesn’t Michel preoccupy you too much?” (I speak here of that study of the cottage in twilight, and of the largest of the turf huts, that is to say the one with the green plot in the foreground) you would certainly say exactly the same of the old churchyard.

And yet neither before the churchyard, nor before the turf huts, did I think of Michel, I thought only of the subject I had before me. A subject by which I indeed think Michel would have been arrested in passing, and which would have struck him.

I do not put myself at all on the same line with Master Michel, but *imitate* Michel is what I decidedly do not do.

*Well*, perhaps I will try to sell something in Antwerp, and I am going to put a few of those very studies from Drenthe in a black wooden frame, which the carpenter here is making for me. I prefer to see my work in a deep black frame, and he makes them cheap enough.

You must not take offence at my speaking about it, brother. I want in my work something sober and characteristic, I approve as little of its being neglected, as I want to see my work in golden frames, in first-class galleries.

You will answer me that other dealers will treat me exactly as you do, except that you, though you cannot occupy yourself with my work, pay me money, and that other dealers certainly will not do so. And that without money I cannot yet live.

My answer is that, in reality, things do not stand out so sharply, and living from hand to mouth, I shall try to manage. I told you before that, in this month, I wanted to come to some decision, and so I must. Because you intend to come already this spring, I do not insist on your taking a decision *directly*, but I tell you I cannot be satisfied with things as they are now; wherever I come, and especially at home, I am always watched, to see what I do with my work, if I get paid for it, etc.; in society, almost everybody always looks out for that, and wants to know all about it.

And that is very natural. But it is very awkward for me always to be in a false position.

*Allons*—things cannot remain as they are now, why not? because they can't. Well—I believe a door must be either open or shut.

I think you will understand that a dealer *cannot* be neutral towards the painters; that it makes *exactly* the same impression, whether you say no, with or without compliments, and it is perhaps even more irritating, if it is said in such a complimentary way.

This is a thing that you will perhaps understand better later than now—I pity the dealers when they get old—they may have made their fortunes, but that is no remedy for everything—at least not then. “*Tout se paye*,” and it very often becomes an icy cold desert for them *then*.

Well—but perhaps you will think differently about it.

And you will say then when a painter breathes his last in a hospital, and is buried with the whores in a common grave, where, after all, many lie, this is also rather tragic, especially if one considers that to die is perhaps not so difficult as to live.

A dealer cannot be blamed for not always having money to help others, but I think he is certainly to blame, when one sees that he speaks very kindly, but leaves my work for what it is.

Now, if I only saw that, finding me not far enough advanced, you did something to help me to make progress, for instance, now that Mauve is out of the question, to bring me in contact with some other solid painter, in short *anything*, some sign that proved to me you really believed in my progress, or wanted to further it. But instead there is—the money, yes, but, for the rest, nothing except that “just plod on,” “have patience!”

I cannot live on that, it is getting too lonesome, too cold, too empty, and too dull for me.

I am no better than anybody else, and I have my needs and wishes as everybody else, and, it is evident, one must protest when one *feels clearly* one is kept too strict and underrated.

If one falls from bad to worse—in my case, this would not be impossible—what does it matter after all? If one is badly off, one has to risk a chance to better oneself.

Brother—I must remind you once more, how I was at the very beginning of our working together. From the very first, I have also drawn your attention to the question of women, I still remember



seeing you off at the station at Rozendaal in the first year, and how I said to you then, that I hated so much being alone, that I preferred to be with a bad woman than to be alone. Perhaps you remember that?

Except the few years which I can hardly understand myself, when I was confused by religious ideas—a kind of mysticism—leaving aside that period, I have always lived with a certain warmth.

Now it is getting grimmer, and colder, and duller around me. And when I say to you that, in the first place, I *will* not stand it, leaving aside the question whether I *can*, I refer to what I said at the very beginning of our relation.

My life must become more animated, if I want to get more *brio* in my work; by practising patience, I do not advance a hair's breadth. Well, good-bye.

Yours,  
Vincent.

As to my drawings—at this moment it seems to me that the water-colours, the pen and ink drawings of weavers, the last pen and ink drawings at which I am working now, are not altogether so dull that they are quite worthless. But *if* I myself come to the conclusion that they are no good, and Theo is right not to show them to anybody—then—then it will be proof the more for me that I have my reason for disapproving our present false position, and I shall try all the more to change it—for better or worse, but not let it remain. If you write, “you remind me of the old people who say that things were better in their youth than now, forgetting that they themselves have changed,” this does not put me out, and if you ask me in your letter how it is you never hear me say “I wish I were like this or like that”—this is because I think that those who cry loudest: “I wish I were like this or like that,” try least of all to reform themselves. Those who talk so much about it, generally do not do it.

At first, the idea that our relation would cease, seemed almost unbearable to me, and I wished so ardently that we might have found some way out.

The depression about it was one of the causes that I wrote you from Drenthe so decidedly, urging you to become a painter.

Which calmed down at once, when I saw your dissatisfaction

about business disappear, when you were again on a better footing with Goupil. At first I only half approved of it: then afterwards, and even now, I find it quite natural, and consider it more and more a mistake on my part, to write you, become a painter.

But for all that, I remain quite dejected, by the falseness of our position. For the moment, it is of much more importance to me to earn fr. 5 than to get fr. 10 by way of protection.

For the very reason that we began as friends, and with a mutual feeling of respect, I know for myself, that I will not suffer it to degenerate into *protection*—to become your protégé I decidedly refuse, Theo.

Why? Because I won't. And it threatens to degenerate more and more into this.

You do absolutely nothing to procure me some distraction, which I need so badly now and then—of meeting people, and seeing things.

Think it over lad, I do not hide my deepest thoughts from you.—I weigh and balance one side as well as the other.

A *wife* you cannot give me, a *child* you cannot give me, work you cannot give me.

Money, yes.

But of what good is it to me, if I must do without the rest; your money remains sterile, because it is not used in the way I always wanted to—a labourer's home if needs be, but if one does not see that one gets a home of one's own, it fares badly with art.

And I for my part—I told you already plainly enough when I was younger, if I cannot get a good wife, I should take a bad one, better a bad one than none at all.

I know people enough, who assert flatly the contrary, and who are just as afraid to have "children" as I am to have "no children."

And for my part, though a thing may turn out wrongly, many a time, I do not easily give up a principle.

And the reason why I am little afraid of the future, is that I know how and why I acted as I did.

And because I know there are more people who feel the same as I do.

Dear Theo,

One of these days I will send you another pen and ink drawing of a weaver—larger than the five others; the loom seen from the front—it will make this little series of drawings more complete; I believe they will look best if you have them mounted on grey Ingres.

It would rather disappoint me if you sent me back these little weavers. And if none among the people you know would care to take them, I would think that you might take them for yourself, as the beginning of a collection of pen and ink drawings of Brabant artisans.

Which I should love to make, and, as I shall be pretty often in Brabant now, should be very eager to do.

On condition of making a series of them, which must be kept together, I will price them low, so that though I might make many drawings of the same kind, they might be kept together. But I, for my part, will agree to what you will think best.

And you see, it is not my aim to cut off relations with you; I only wanted to point out that, it seemed necessary to me, when I do send the pen drawings, you at least show them to somebody.

As to the matter you wrote to me about, I think in such a case, when one sees no possibility of carrying it through, there is one thing one must not forget.

That is, if the woman has loved you, has really cared for you, and you for her, this period of love is a piece of good fortune in life.

She, the woman, may be beautiful or plain, young or old, better or worse, that matters only indirectly. The only thing that matters is that you have loved each other. On parting—don't wipe that out, or don't try to forget it—the only cliff to be avoided then, *is* that of self-righteousness, one must not pretend then that the woman is under great obligations to the man, one must part as if one were under obligation oneself—that is, in my opinion, more courteous and humane—perhaps that is your opinion too. Love always brings difficulties, that is true, but the good side of it, is that it gives energy in short.

Of myself I believe—and I think it possible that with you it is the same case—that I have not yet enough experience of women.

What was taught us about them in our youth is quite wrong, that is sure, it was quite contrary to nature, and one must try to learn from experience. It would be very pleasant if everybody was good, and the world was good, etc.—yes—but it seems to me that we see more and more we are no good, no more than the world in general is, of which we are an atom—and the world no more good than we are. One may try one's best, or act carelessly, the result is always different from what one really wanted. But whether the result be better or worse, fortunate or unfortunate, to do a thing is better than to *do* nothing. If one only bewares of becoming a prim, self-righteous prig—as Uncle Vincent calls it—one may be *even* as good as one likes. Well, good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent

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Dear Theo,

Yesterday evening I received your letter with enclosed fr. 100. I can tell you that, having had less expenses by my temporary stay here, I am now at a point of being able to cover my deficit of last year.

I draw your attention to this, that you may see I hate carelessness in business, as much as you do, and that I make a point of fulfilling my obligations to other people. And that I am in no mood to be careless about business, *on the contrary*, I assure you.

It is my firm intention to try to carry on my work, and you must not think I work less hard here every day than I used to do.

All is well that ends well, says the proverb; now, as to the misgivings I wrote you to feel about continuing to accept money from you. We *can* wind up now, at a moment when I get off without deficit, all the more reason for me always to call *most generous* the way you dealt with me financially. And when I had a deficit at the end of last year, I do not at all pretend it was your fault. I only repeat, that I am very glad no bill is left unpaid now.—

Furnishers of paint and other things have all been treated honestly and paid.

To you, however, I owe a great debt, and if I continued in exactly the same way, it would grow worse and worse. Now I

want to make you a proposal for the future. Let me send you my work, and keep for yourself what you like, but the money which I shall receive from you after March, I insist on considering as money I earn. And I quite approve of it being, in the beginning, less than I received till now. Towards the end of January, or the beginning of February, I wrote to you that, on my coming home, I had been struck by the fact that the money I used to receive from you, was considered, in the first place, as something *precarious*, and secondly, as what I shall call an alms, given to a fool. And I could state the fact that this opinion was even communicated to people who had *nothing* absolutely to do with it—for instance, the respectable natives of this region—and I was asked at least three times a week, by absolute strangers: “How is it that you do not sell your work?”

In how far one's daily life can be pleasant under such circumstances, I leave for you to decide.

For my part, I say most decidedly that, whatever you may think of what I received from you till now, I, for my part, consider it as a thing which I shall pay back, if possible.

If I have some chance with my work, I shall most certainly pay it back. For the present, there can be no question about it, so we will not speak about it.

Towards March, I will send you some water-colours from here. If you do not want them, I will take them to somebody else, *but I prefer to deal with you.*

Those water-colours will have their faults, yet I do not think it foolish of me to begin to show my work, to bring it before the eye of the public.

Rappard, at a certain moment, did the same, and carried it through from the very beginning.

I, for my part, do it rather reluctantly, but I must do it.

So from March, I shall begin regularly to send my work here and there. And in the first place to you, but do not think yourself obliged to take anything which you would not really care for. But after March I will accept no money from you, or at least, absolutely as little as possible, for which I do not give some work in return.

I hope also that you and father will not thwart me in my taking no other studio for the present than the little mangle room here.



I will take another, and not live with father any longer, as soon as my work brings in enough money to afford my again taking a house.

Since I am here, not a day has passed, I think, that I have not been working from morning till night, with the weavers or the peasants; I shall be very glad if you approve of my proposal. Then extremes will be avoided and we keep a straight course. If you know of a better plan, I shall be glad to hear of it. Good-bye, and thanks for what you sent. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I just received your letter. As your letter crossed one of mine, written in the same tone as the one you answered to-day, you will see that I am speaking in a different mood than the rash one which you suppose. Just because I say quietly, what I have to say, be it not in the tone which is daily used (it is a serious question here), I cannot avail myself of your kindness to consider it as said "in haste."

That very idea of yours (that I should have spoken in haste, and rashly) is sufficient proof to me, we have come to a point where more words cannot bring us any further, and I think it better to let this question rest.

You say, you *must* speak about the financial side. So must I.

Brother, know it well, I repeat what I said before, without change, concerning your noble help—and that money *can* be repaid, but not kindness such as yours.

But look here, what I want, and what you yourself will call reasonable. I must take such measures as to have the free disposal of what I receive.

I mean that I can only accept *that* money which I can spend as I like, without having to ask anybody's opinion.

I prefer to have fr. 100 a month, and be at liberty with it, than fr. 200, without being at liberty.

I should like to receive till March the usual amount. That will

enable me to pay everything I have to pay, and to lay up some provision of necessary things. This is the first measure that must be taken.

Last year, the year '83, has been a hard, sad year for me, and especially the end has been bitterly, bitterly sad.

Well, we will not speak of that any more.

After March, we are free from both sides. But if for a time you could pay father some allowance, as I do not want to be too great a burden to him, that will be wise and well, I think.

However, this must be between father and you then. I will then, if necessary, try and get a job. I do not even mind what. But know it well that, realizing the fact that apparently we could not sufficiently agree if we continued together, I am positively in earnest, in intending to try not to accept any longer favours from you, in the form of money, where they would not leave me quite free in my actions.

You will say that you leave me free, yes—but there is a certain restraint after all. And I prefer to have *less* from somebody else, when *after all I am not free in things that regard nobody else but myself*.

You must not suppose from this that I want to have done with you, on the contrary—you are an art dealer, very well, when I make something which you think saleable, I will even rather sell it to you than to somebody else, but it must be an arrangement which does not put me in a false position, but to sell in the literal sense is what I certainly want.

I thank you for your letter, I appreciate many things in it. Good-bye, and believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

362

Dear Theo,

Look here, this will not do. In your letter you speak about an "amour traînant" and that when you had to face that question you finally broke it off. Well, this is at least a manly action.

I have to do, not exactly with an "amour traînant"—but with an "amitié traînante."

Don't you think we might apply the same system to it?

One of the things of which I say, "this will not do," is that you send me a third of the money, and write, "I *could* send you the rest, but it suits me better to do so towards the end of the month, if it does not inconvenience you." So must you ask me if it suits me or not? You know yourself how I used last month three-quarters of the money to pay off things. But I did not complain about it, not even when the money arrived only on 10th March.

But now, when I promised to pay different other things in March, which I owed when I came here, to have to wait now again till the end of the month, whether that is exactly a piece of good luck for me, I leave to you to decide. . . . What you say about my work is silly—I call it silly when you tell me how the jury of the Salon would judge my work when I never said a syllable about sending it to the Salon.

If you do not care any longer so much for Lhermitte, I tell you that the fault lies with you. I agree with you, that I rate Millet perhaps higher still, but the deuce! to see so many things of Lhermitte's as you do, and not to be sufficiently impressed, to forget all comparisons—I call that narrow-minded. I never spoke to you about sending to the Salon, did I?—but I did speak to you at the time, about the people of the illustrations, especially about Buhot. And I don't take that back, that I urged you to do so.

If you meant it seriously that, after another period of hard work on my side, you would try to show my drawings, I would perfectly agree not to bring them before the public before we had some thoroughly good drawings.

On one condition, however—that, in the meantime, my life were not too lonesome and miserable, my position not too false, but that I could stand the present with a sense of freedom. But how is it at present? you do *absolutely nothing* to procure me some distraction, which I sometimes need so badly, by meeting people, or seeing things.

It has been so already for more than a year, and now the reaction is that I say in this way, it is all of no use—*neither for you nor for me*, and it would be stupid to go on in that way, stupid! Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

I am rather astonished that I haven't heard from you. Because you write "if it puts you to inconvenience to wait, write me by return of mail."

Well, I wrote to you, that to wait longer certainly inconvenienced me—but I got no direct answer to that. It is certainly bad economy, time is also money, and as I have even to wait for colours, the economy is even perfectly *absurd*, in my opinion. As long as there is any spirit left in me, you can hardly expect me to agree to this slackening more and more. . . . But I hear that your friend Braat has fallen ill—(in fact I always found him so the short time that I knew him)—perhaps that was the reason that made you forget it—well.

However it may be, be so kind to answer my last letter, and to let me know whether or not you will change it in that way.

Mother is improving gradually.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

The real cause of the question, is the understanding or misunderstanding each other—a question of coolness or warmth of feeling between us.

And what Zola says about "dragging on a connection," I find it as true as you do—it deadens all energy.—But the question remains, what is the cause of that dragging on?

I, for my part, who prefer to live in the country rather than in the city, do not want at all to break with you, but as it is now, when I see that, notwithstanding my working all day long, I do not get any further with you, cannot stand it, and see in it a neglect of my own affairs, for which after all *I* would be responsible later on.—Will you see to it that my work is brought under the eyes of those people who if not now, then later on, must become its buyers—all right—then I need not bother about it, and have only to occupy myself with the painting.

If I did not feel everyday more that I needs must earn some money, I would keep my studies quietly for myself, as Rappard

does. But, as you say, we are not in Rappard's case—and for all that, I get more and more cramped. To-day I brought home my ninth painted study of a weaver, painting costs money, and when I have to wait for the colours, as now happens again and again, I lose time—and look here—if you felt a little more interest in it, we would have what we need.

364

Dear Theo,

I just receive your letter and enclosed fr. 250. If I may consider your letter as an answer to my proposal, I can indeed agree to what you say. In short, to avoid further discussion or quarrelling, in order to have some answer when in daily life, they accuse me of being without any "source of income," I want to consider the money I may receive from you as money that I have earned!

Of course I will send you *my work every month*. As you say, that work is your property then, and I perfectly agree with you, that you have the full right to do anything with it, I even couldn't make any objection, if you liked to tear it in pieces.

I, for my part, needing money, am obliged to accept it, even if somebody says to me, "I want to put away that drawing of yours, or I want to throw it in the fire, you can get so much money for it"; under the circumstances I would say: "All right, give me the money, there is my work, I want to get on," in order to get on, I must have money, I try to get it, so as long as I get your monthly allowance, which without conditions of forbidding me to do things, is useful and necessary to me, I will not break with you, and I agree to everything if needs be.

This way of mine, to consider you and your money, balances your way of considering me and my work—and as long as the balance is kept—I agree to it. If I receive money from you, and you receive drawings or pictures from me, and if I have something to justify myself in the eyes of the world, though we might have nothing else in common, write and speak about nothing, even then, I feel satisfied for the moment, and I perfectly agree to it.

For this month, I have for you some pen and ink drawings, in the first place, those that are at Rappard's for the moment, about



which I had a letter from him, that he liked them *all*, and *especially* admired the sentiment in “Behind the Hedges” and “The Kingfisher,” and the first three “Winter Garden” which he liked also very much.

Besides those, I have a few painted studies which are *your property*, which I will send you *if you like*, but if you don’t care to have them, I will ask you if I may keep them sometime, as I need them for my work. The one is a large weaver, who weaves a piece of red cloth—the little church in the cornfields—a view of a little old village here in the neighbourhood.

365

Dear Theo,

The drawings for this month are still at Rappard’s, else I should already have sent them to you. And as Rappard intends to come and stay with us soon for some time, I have asked him to bring them with him then.

Now, just think, if it wouldn’t be very unkind of you towards him, if you didn’t take any notice of his visit, when he comes here erelong. Think whether it is correct, that you, who know Rappard, have seen nothing of his work, do not even know what he makes but from what I tell you, that you do not take the least notice of him.—Yet he is one of the people that will count—that will assert themselves—of whose work one will have to take notice. At one time Rappard came to you, and felt a certain awe of you, who knew so much about art.—Since that year he spent in Paris—what enormous progress he has made!

I don’t think you would regret it if you took to heart the hint I give you. I simply should want you to renew the acquaintance with him.

There is the more reason for it because he is more advanced than I am. I say this, simply to prevent your committing a negligence. As to Rappard, it is curious what absurd things he sometimes hears about his work, which he takes quite coolly. One must be prepared for that, and have a certain self-confidence, not to let oneself be confounded or upset. Friends who make up

with cordiality for the bother the work brings are of great value to a painter. If you would feel personal sympathy for Rappard's work, he would certainly not feel indifferent towards you, either.

But he, as well as I, get more and more disabused about finding sympathy, and are more and more determined to hold on, without minding anybody. Good-bye.

Yours,  
Vincent.

366

Dear Theo,

Enclosed, I send you a sketch of a picture which, among others, I have on hand; this is an afternoon effect of trees in blossom. Among the drawings you will get as soon as Rappard comes here, there are three treating the same subject, what struck me in nature, was the remarkably typical, half old-fashioned, half-rustic character of that garden. And that I made three pen and ink drawings of that same nook, besides several studies which I destroyed, was just because I wanted to render that character in some intimate details, which are not expressed easily, or without effort, or by chance.

If I, for my part, have some self-confidence in my work, it is also because it costs me too much effort, than that I should believe nothing would be gained by it, or that it should be done in vain.

And I repeat, I shrug my shoulders at the banalities in which most connoisseurs seem to indulge, more and more.

Rappard had on hand a few pictures, which he saw a chance of finishing with models he could get, so he wrote to me, that instead of coming at once, he will come in May, and perhaps would ask then, to be allowed to stay somewhat longer, if it were convenient, because he intends to work a little here.

I wish he could come at the same time as you.

You must by no means suppose that I have great illusions about the appreciation of my work; I think one must be satisfied, if one succeeds in convincing a few people of the seriousness one aims at, and is understood by them without flattery.



For the rest, if there is anything more than that, so much the better, but one must think as little as possible about it. But yet, I believe the work must be seen, because from the very stream of passers-by, the few friends will subside. But what people in general say and do, one need not mind that. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

367

Dear Theo,

Many happy returns of the day.

That was important news indeed in your last letter, and I think you will be glad the situation has become more clear at least.

I am looking forward already to your next letter.

As to the work, I have on hand rather a large picture, of a weaver, the loom seen from the front—the little figure a dark silhouette against the white wall. And at the same time, another, which I began this winter, a loom on which a piece of red cloth is being woven; there the loom is seen from aside. I also started two more: effects on the heath. And a landscape with pollard birches.

Those looms will cost me still a lot of hard work, but they are in reality such splendid things, all that old oakwood against a greyish wall, that I certainly believe it is a good thing to have them painted. But we must try to get them so that they will harmonize in colour and tone with other Dutch pictures. Soon I hope to start another two of weavers, where the figure comes in quite differently, that is to say, the weaver does not sit behind it, but is arranging the threads of the cloth. I have seen them weaving in the evening by lamplight, which gives very Rembrandtesque effects.

Nowadays, they use a kind of suspension lamp, but I got from a weaver a little lamp, as, for instance, the one in “*La Veillée*” by Millet. They used to work by them formerly.

The other day, I also saw coloured pieces of cloth, woven by evening; I will take you there when you come here. When I saw it, they were also just arranging the threads, so dark, bent figures

against the light, standing out against the colour of the cloth, cast big shadows of the laths and beams of the loom on the white walls.

Good-bye, write soon if you can.

Yours,  
Vincent.

368

Dear Theo,

I have waited too long to answer your last letter, and I will tell you the reason. Let me begin by thanking you for your letter and enclosed fr. 200. And then I will tell you, that to-day I just finished arranging a spacious new studio, which I have rented.

Two rooms, a big one, and a smaller one adjoining.

That kept me pretty busy the last two weeks, I think I shall be able to work there, much better than in the little room at home. And I hope when you see it you will approve of the measure I have taken.

For the rest, I have been very busy painting the large weaver I told you about, and I also started to paint the little church tower, you know.

What you write about the Salon is very important. As to what you say about Puvis de Chavannes, I am very glad you see his work thus, and I perfectly agree with your appreciation of his talent. As to the colourists, after all I think about them as you do. I can become quite absorbed in a Puvis de Chavannes, but for all that I should feel exactly the same as you do for a landscape with cows, by Mauve, and paintings of Maris and Israëls.

As to my own palette, you will *not* find in my work from here, the silvery tones, but rather brown ones (bitumen for instance and bistre) of which I do not doubt some people will disapprove.

But you will see for yourself when you come here.

I have been so busy painting that I have not made a single drawing of late. Van Rappard writes me that he will come at the end of this week; I am very glad.

Moreover, I think he will come back this year for a longer time.



He brings a number of my drawings with him, which I will then send you at once.

Perhaps, *after some time*, I shall agree with you that the change of last year has improved my position, and that it has been a change for the better.

But I shall always regret that I had to give up a thing then, which I should have liked to carry on.

I think that mother is getting on very well, yesterday she came in her little carriage to see my new studio.

Of late, I am getting on better with people here than I did at the beginning, which is of great importance to me, for one decidedly needs some distraction, and if one feels too lonely the work always suffers from it; however, perhaps one must be prepared for it, that this will not last.

But I feel quite optimistic about it, it seems to me that the people in general at Nuenen are better than those at Etten or Helvoirt; there is more sincerity here, at least that is my impression, after having been here some time.

It is true the people here look at things from a clergyman's point of view, but in such a way that I, for my part, don't feel any scruple in putting up with it.

*And the Brabant of one's dreams*, reality almost comes very near it sometimes.

My original intention to settle in Brabant, that came to nought, I must tell you that it has again strong attraction for me.

But knowing how such a plan can fail, we must see whether or no it would prove an illusion, well, for the present, I have enough to do. I have again space enough to be able to work with a model, and as to how long it will last, there is absolutely no saying.

Well, good-bye, the Salon will certainly give you a lot of work, but for all that it will be an interesting time.

Once more, thanks for what you sent, which indeed I really needed, because of this change. I hope you will approve of it when you see how I arranged things. Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Love from all at home, they ask you to write to them.

Dear Theo,

I want to tell you that Rappard has been here some ten days, and that he sends you his best regards.

As you can imagine, we paid many a visit to the weavers, and took many a trip to all kinds of beautiful spots.

He was greatly pleased with the scenery here, which I, too, begin to like more and more.

As he has brought the pen and ink drawings with him, I can send them to you now.

Since I made them, though it is relatively a short time ago, I have rather changed my technique.

I have done nothing but painting of late.

And I am curious to know whether you will find something in it when you come.

Last winter, you wrote to me that you found in my water-colours of that time, some parts which you thought more satisfactory of colour and tone than before. And you said something like: "if you stick to that."

Now, you will certainly see how very decidedly I shall stick to that, and how, in what I painted since, the qualities of those water-colours are even more emphasized.

Just now, I finished a figure of a weaver standing before a loom, and one sees the machine in the background.

And I am working on a view of the pond at the back of our garden! Rappard has made here a little weaver, which I liked very much, and a bust of a girl who is winding thread.

While he was here, I also made a weaver's cottage by evening, again in the style of those cottages in Drenthe.

Rappard is going to paint a large picture of the Fishmarket at Utrecht, with many figures.

I hope I shall be able to show you some of his work when you come this summer. For he has promised to send me some of his things, as I shall do with mine, in order to have at least an idea of what we mutually are making.

I am very much pleased with the new studio, it is large and quite dry. I hope soon to hear from you, for the new studio has brought many expenses. But, of course, it is a great advantage that I need

not pay my board and lodging, otherwise I should *not have been able* to paint as much as I have of late. And you will see when you come, that this has helped me to make some progress.

At least this was Rappard's opinion, with whom I should not like to change places for the moment, as regards colour.

Good-bye, write soon, and believe me with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

The drawing *Weaver*, is the drawing of the machine from that picture I have on hand, except the machinery, there are also in it the effects, and light and brown of the loom, etc. But *please* don't think that this is the general effect of the picture. For the picture is not so tame.

370

Dear Theo,

Very often I still think of your pleasant visit, which I hope will soon be repeated, and then, for a somewhat longer time.

Since you have been here, I have been working hard on the figure of a spinning woman, of which I enclose a scratch.

It is fairly large sized, and painted in a dark tone, the figure is dressed in blue, with a mouse-coloured shawl.

I hope to make another one, of an old man at the shuttle wheel, before a little window, of which you perhaps remember a small study.

I should be very glad to receive soon the measures of your frames, then I would be able to start. Perhaps if the measure fits I will make a small one of that spinning woman.

I just copy for you the following passage from: "Les artistes de mon temps," by Ch. Blanc.

"Trois mois environ avant la mort d'Eug. Delacroix, nous le rencontrâmes dans les galeries du Palais Royal, sur les dix heures du soir, Paul Chenavard et moi. C'était au sortir d'un grand dîner où l'on avait agité des questions d'art, et la conversation s'était prolongée entre nous deux sur le même sujet, avec cette

vivacité, cette chaleur, que l'on met surtout aux discussions inutiles. Nous en étions à la couleur, et je disais :

‘ Pour moi les grands coloristes sont ceux, qui ne font pas le ton local,’ et j’allais développer mon thème, lorsque nous aperçûmes Eugène Delacroix dans la galerie de la Rotonde.

Il vint à nous en s’écriant : je suis sûr qu’ils parlent peinture. En effet, lui dis-je, j’étais sur le point de soutenir une proposition qui n’est pas, je crois, un paradoxe, et dont vous êtes en tout cas meilleur juge que personne ; je disais que les grands coloristes ne font pas le ton local, et avec vous je n’ai pas besoin sans doute d’aller plus loin.

Eugène Delacroix fit deux pas en arrière, selon son habitude en clignant les yeux : ‘ Cela est parfaitement vrai,’ dit-il, ‘ voilà un ton par exemple (il montrait du doigt le ton gris et sale du pavé), eh bien, si l’on disait à Paul Veronèse : peignez-moi une belle femme blonde dont la chair soit de ce ton-là ; il la peindrait, et la femme *serait une blonde dans son tableau.*”

As to drab colours, in my opinion, one must not judge the colours of a picture each apart, a drab colour for instance side by side with a strong brownish red, a dark blue or olive-green may express the very delicate, fresh green of a meadow, or a little corn-field.

And yet I believe de Bock, who baptized certain colours “drab colours,” certainly would not contradict this—for I myself heard him say once, that in some pictures by Corot, for instance in evening skies, there are colours which in the picture are very *luminous* and, considered *apart*, are in fact of a *rather dark, greyish tone*. Father and mother will write you soon, and thank you for your letter.

But to revert to that question of painting an evening sky, or a blonde woman with a drab-colour like the grey of the pavement, if one considers this well, that question has a *double* meaning.

In the first place :

“ A dark colour may seem *light*, this is in fact more a question of *tone*. But then, as regards the real *colour*, a reddish grey, relatively little red, will appear more or less red, according to the adjoining colours.

And with blue and yellow it is the same.

One has to put but a very little yellow in a colour to make it

seem very yellow, if one puts that colour in, or next a violet, or lilac tone.

I remember how somebody tried to paint a red roof, on which the light was falling, by means of vermilion and chrome, etc.! That did not do.

Jaap Maris did it in many a water-colour, by putting a very little bit of glaucous red-ochre on a colour that was reddish. And it perfectly expressed the sunlight on the red roofs.

As soon as I have time, I will copy from that article on Delacroix another part about the laws that always remain true for colours. I sometimes think that people, when they speak about *colour*, really mean *tone*.

And perhaps there are at present more *tonists* than *colourists*.

This is not the same, though it goes very well together.

I quite agree with you that, in the present days, it is often very hard to find satisfaction for the need of talking with people, who *know* how to give advice and from whom one *learns* and gets *light* without their playing the schoolmaster, or without their using nothing but big, empty words, which are, after all, banalities or platitudes.

Well, but *nature* is a thing about which one can learn to know a great deal. Good-bye, please don't forget the *rabbit* measure of your frames. Believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

371

Dear Theo,

In my last letter, I think I told you already, that besides that spinning woman, I also wanted to start a large man's figure. Enclosed you will now find a sketch of it. Perhaps you remember two studies of the same nook, which I had already in the studio when you were here.

I have read with great pleasure "Les Maîtres d'Autrefois" by Fromentin. And in that book, I frequently found the same questions treated, which have greatly preoccupied me of late, and of which, in fact, I am continually thinking, especially since I



indirectly heard, when I was last at the Hague, things that Israël had said about beginning in a low scale, and making relatively dark colours seem already light. In short, to express light by opposition with black. I know already what you are going to say about "too black," but, at the same time, I am not quite convinced as yet, that for instance a grey sky, *must* always be painted in the local tone. Mauve does it, but Ruysdael does not, Dupré does not. Corot and Daubigny???

Well, with figure painting, it is the same as with landscape. I mean Israël paints a white wall quite differently from Regnault or Fortuny.

And consequently, the figure stands out quite differently against it.

When I hear you speak about so many new names it is not always easy for me to understand, when I have seen absolutely *nothing* of them. And from what you told me about "impressionism," I have indeed understood that it is a different thing from what I thought, but what it really is, is not quite clear to me.

But I, for my part, find Israël for instance so enormously great that I am little curious or desirous for other or newer things.

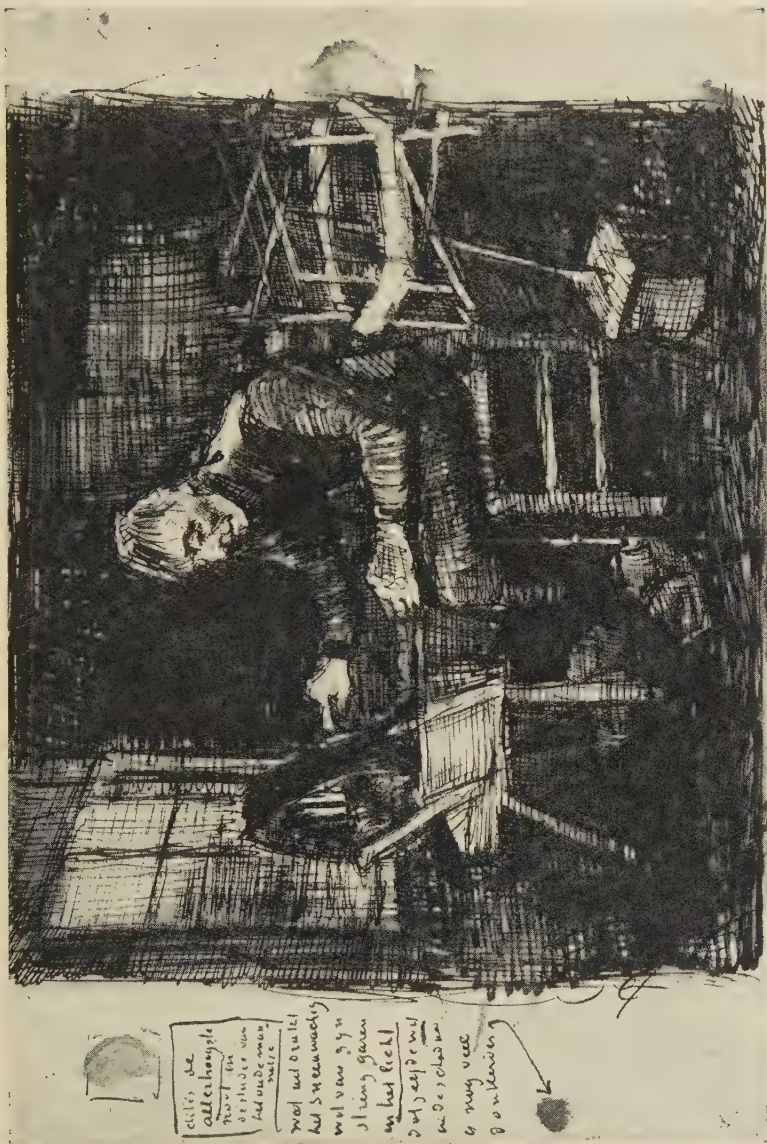
Fromentin says about Ruysdael that at present they are *much farther* advanced in technique than he was, also much more advanced than Cabat, who sometimes greatly resembles Ruysdael by his stately simplicity, for instance in the picture at the Luxembourg.

But what Ruysdael, what Cabat said, has it become untrue or superfluous for that reason? No, it is the same thing with Israël, with de Groux too (de Groux was very simple).

But if one says *clearly* what one has to say is not that, strictly spoken, enough? And by saying it with more charm, it may become more pleasant to hear, what I do not disdain, still it does not add very much to the beauty of that what is true, because truth has a beauty of its own.

The measurements of the foregoing sketch are about  $105 \times 95$  c.m. and that of the little woman spinning  $10 \times 75$ . They are painted in a tone of bistre and bitumen, which, in my opinion, are just suited to express the *warm* chiaroscuro of a close, dusty interior. Artz would certainly find it too dingy.

It has annoyed me *long since*, Theo, that some of the painters



of the present rob us of the bistre and the bitumen, with which yet so many splendid things have been painted, which, well applied, make the colouring ripe and mellow and generous, and are so distinguished at the same time. And possess such very remarkable and peculiar qualities.

But they require, at the same time, some efforts to learn to use them, for they must be used differently from the ordinary colours, and I think it quite possible that many are discouraged by the experiments one must first make, and which, of course, do not succeed the very first day one begins to use them. It is now just about a *year ago* that I began to use them, just for interiors, but at first I was awfully disappointed in them, yet I could not forget the beautiful things I had seen made with them.

You have better opportunities than I have to hear about books on art. If you meet with good books, as, for instance, now that book of Fromentin on the Dutch painters, or if you remember any don't forget I should be *very glad* if you bought some—provided they treat of *technical* matters—and if you deducted the money from my usual allowance, I certainly intend to study the theory seriously, I do not at all think it useless, and I believe that what one feels by instinct, or by intuition, often becomes definite and clear, if one is guided in one's efforts by some real practical words.

Even if there might occur in a book, just *one* or *very few* things of that kind, it is sometimes worth while not only to read it, but even to buy it, just at present.

And then in the time of Thoré and Blanc, there have been people who have written things, which, alas, are falling into oblivion already.

To give you an example.

Do you know what is “*un ton entier*” and “*un ton rompre*”? Of course you can *see* it, in a picture, but can you also explain what you see? What is meant by *rompre*? Such things one ought to know also theoretically, either practically as a painter, or in discussing colour as a connoisseur.

Most people give it *whatever meaning* they like, and yet these words, for instance, have a very definite signification.

The *laws* of the colours are unutterably beautiful, just because they are *not accidental*. In the same way that people at present no longer believe in fantastic *miracles*, no longer believe in a God who

capriciously and despotically flies from one thing to another, but because one begins to feel more respect and admiration for, and faith in nature, in the same way, and for the same reasons, I think that in art, the old-fashioned idea of inborn genius, inspiration, etc., I do not say must be put aside, but thoroughly considered, verified—and greatly modified. I do not deny, however, the existence of genius, and even of its being innate. But I certainly do deny its consequences, that theory and instruction should, as a matter of course, always be useless.

*The same thing* which I applied in the spinning woman and the old man winding thread, I hope, or rather I shall try, to do much *better* later on.

But in these two studies from life, *I have been a little more myself* than I succeeded in being in most of the other studies—unless in some of my drawings.

With regard to black—*by chance* I did not use it in these studies, as I needed, among others, some stronger effects than black, and indigo with terra sienna, prussian blue with burnt sienna, really give much deeper tones than pure black itself. When I hear people say “in nature there is no black” I sometimes think, in colours there is, in fact, no black either.

You must, however, beware of falling into the error, that the colourists do not use black, for, of course, as soon as an element of blue, red, or yellow is mixed with black, it becomes a grey, namely, a dark, reddish, yellowish, or bluish grey. In Ch. Blanc “*Les Artistes de mon Temps*,” I found very interesting, for instance, what he says about the technique of Velasquez, whose shadows and half-tones, consist mostly of *colourless, cool greys*, the chief elements of which are black and a little white. In which neutral, colourless milieux, the least cloud or shade of red, already takes effect.

Well, good-bye, do write soon if you have anything to tell me.

It sometimes surprises me that you do not feel *as much* for Jules Dupré as I should like you to do.

I am firmly convinced that, if I saw again, what I formerly saw of his, far from thinking it less beautiful, I should think it *still more beautiful* than I always instinctively did. Dupré is *perhaps* even more of a colourist than Corot and Daubigny, though these two are so too, and Daubigny especially is very *daring* in colour. But in Dupré’s colour there is something of a splendid



symphony, *complete, studied, manly*. I imagine Beethoven must be something like that. . . .

That symphony is *enormously* calculated, and yet simple, and infinitely deep as nature itself. That is what I think of Dupré.

Well, good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

372

Dear Theo,

My hearty thanks for your letter, and enclosed fr. 200. Thanks for giving the size of the frame, in which I intend to make a little spinner, after the large study.

I was glad to hear some good news about Breitner. The last impressions I had of him were, as you know, rather unfavourable, because of three large canvases, which I saw at his studio, and in which I literally did not distinguish anything that might be located, either in reality or in an imaginary world. But a few water-colours which he then had on hand, horses in the dunes, though very sketchy, were much better than. And I saw things in it which make me understand quite well that the picture of which you speak must be good. As to the Society of Draughtsmen, firstly, I quite forgot it, because I was busy painting those figures, secondly, now that your letter reminds me of it, I am not very keen on it, for, as I told you already last summer, I can only expect a refusal of the petitioned membership, which refusal, one can, however, consider as a kind of necessary evil, that can be redressed next year, and as such, the request has its *raison d'être* perhaps.

Besides, as I quite forgot it, I have not one water-colour on hand, and should have to start new ones in a hurry, if it were not already too late for this year.

And when I tell you that I am just now quite absorbed again in two new large studies of weaver interiors, you will understand I am in no mood for it. Especially as it might cause new disagreements if I applied again to the gentlemen at the Hague.

As to these two weavers, one is a part of the loom, with the figure, and a small window.



The other is an interior, with three small windows, looking out on the yellowish green, contrasting with the blue of the cloth that is woven on the loom, and the blouse of the weaver, which is again of another blue.

But that what struck me most in nature of late I have not started yet, for want of a good model. The half-ripe cornfields are at present of a dark golden tone, ruddy or gold bronze. This is raised to a maximum of effect by opposition to the broken cobalt tone of the sky.

Imagine in such a background, women's figures, very rough, very energetic, with sun-bronzed faces and arms and feet, with dusty, coarse indigo clothes and a black bonnet in the form of a baret on the short-cut hair, while on the way to their work they pass between the corn along a dusty path of ruddy violet, with some green weeds, carrying rakes on their shoulders, or a loaf of black bread under the arm—a pitcher or brass coffee kettle. I saw that same subject repeatedly of late, and in all kinds of variations. And I assure you it was really typical.

Very rich, and at the same time very sober, very refined, artistical. And I am quite absorbed in it.

But my colour bill has run up so high that I must be wary of starting new things in a big size, the more so, because it will cost me much in models; if I could only get fit models, just of the type I want (rough, flat faces with low foreheads and thick lips, not sharp, but full and Millet-like) and with those very same clothes.

For it demands great exactness, and one is not at liberty to deviate from the colours of the costume, as the effect lies in the analogy of the broken indigo tone, with the broken cobalt tone, intensified by the secret elements of orange, in the ruddy bronze of the corn.

It would be a thing that gave a good impression of summer. I think summer is not easy to express, generally, at least often, a summer effect is either impossible or ugly, at least I think so, but then, as opposition, there is the twilight.

But I mean to say, that it is not easy to find a summer sun effect, which is as rich, and as simple, and as pleasant to look at as the characteristic effects of the other seasons.

Spring is tender, green young corn and pink apple blossoms.

Autumn is the contrast of the yellow leaves against violet tones

Winter is the snow with the black silhouettes.

But now, if summer is the opposition of blues against an element of orange, in the gold bronze of the corn, one could paint a picture which expressed the mood of the seasons, in each of the contrasts of the complementary colours (red and green, blue and orange, yellow and violet, white and black).

Well, I am longing to hear about your journey to London, etc.

Mother is making but little progress in walking. Good-bye, and once more thanks for your letter and the enclosed. Believe me,

Yours,

Vincent.

The best thing I know—for the frame—is to take a few stretchers of that size, then we can see which turns out best.

373

Dear Theo,

I was glad to hear from your letter to father and mother that you intend to go to London on 4th August, and from there will come here. I long again very much for your coming, and to know what you will think of the work that I have made since.

The last things I made are two rather large studies of ox-wagons, a black ox and a red one.

I have also been working again at the old church tower in the fields, at evening, of which I made a larger study than the former one, with the cornfields around it.

Rappard sent me back the book of Vosmaer which belongs to you; I began to read it, and perhaps it is my fault, but I think it awfully dull, and written in a real academical, sermonizing tone. Perhaps you will find so too when you read it again.

Have you read Sapho by Daudet?

It is very beautiful, and so finished, so “*la nature serré de près*,” that the heroine lives, breathes, and one *hears* her voice, literally *hears* it, and forgets one is *reading*.

When you come, you will also see a few new weavers.

Nature is certainly very typical here; I am still very pleased with the studio.

When you come, we must visit together some farms and weavers.

In October, Rappard intends to come back here, probably he is now again in Drenthe.

Well, I write rather in a hurry, for I am head over ears in my work, I work a good deal early in the morning or in the evening, and everything is sometimes so unutterably beautiful then.

Good-bye, believe me,

Yours,  
Vincent.

374

Dear Theo,

(August '84.)

I just want to drop you a line while you are in London. Thanks for your last letter, and enclosed fr. 150.

How I should love to walk with you in London, particularly in real London weather, when the City, especially in certain old parts near the river, has aspects that are very melancholy, but, at the same time have a remarkably striking character, which some English artists of these days have begun to make, after they had learnt from the French to observe and to paint. But unluckily, it is very difficult to get a view of that English art which for you and for me is really the most interesting. In exhibitions, the *greater part* of the pictures generally is *not* sympathetic.

I hope however, that you will meet here and there with things which will make you understand. Now I, for my part, always remember some English pictures, for instance "Chill October" by Millais, for instance the drawings of Fred. Walker and Pinwell. Just notice the Hobbema in the National Gallery; you will not forget a few very beautiful Constables there, among others "Cornfield," nor that other one in South Kensington, called "Valley Farm."

I am very curious to hear what struck you most, and what you will have seen there. Last week, I was every day in the fields during the harvest, of which I made a composition.

I made this for somebody in Eindhoven who wants to decorate a dining-room. He intended to do this with compositions of diverse *saints*. I begged him to consider whether the appetite of the worthy people who would have to sit down at that table would not be more stimulated by six illustrations from peasant life of the

Meerij—at the same time symbolizing the four seasons, than by the mystical personages above mentioned. And after a visit to the studio, the man became quite enthusiastic about it.

But he wants to paint those panels himself, and will he be able to do so? (but I should design and paint the compositions in reduction).

He is a man with whom I want to remain on good terms—a former goldsmith, who has collected three times, a *very* important collection of antiques and sold it again. He is rich now, and has built himself a house that is again full of antiques, and furnished with some *very* beautiful oaken chests, etc. He is decorating the ceilings and walls himself, and really does it well sometimes. But he



absolutely wants “painting” in the dining-room, and has begun to paint twelve panels of flowers.

There remain six panels in the breadth, and for these I gave him preliminary sketches of a sower, plougher, shepherd, harvest, potato gathering, ox-wagon in the snow.

But I don’t know whether it will lead to anything, for I have no definite arrangement with him.

But he is pleased with this first panel, as well as with my sketches for the other subjects.

I long very much for your coming.

I am still pleased to be here, at times I do miss some things, but my work absorbs me sufficiently.

Well, remember me to Mr. O., if you run up against him.

When you come here, you will find all the peasants ploughing and sowing spurrey, or they will have just finished doing it.

I have seen splendid sunsets over the stubble fields.  
Good-bye for the present.

Yours,  
Vincent.

375

Dear Theo,

You are perfectly right in asking me why I did not answer you yet. I certainly did receive your letter with enclosed fr. 150.

I began writing to you, especially to thank you for evidently having understood my letter, and then to say that I only *count* on fr. 100, though I can hardly manage with it, as long as I do not sell, but nevertheless if it is fr. 150, there are fr. 50 more than I counted on, as our *first* arrangement for *the Hague* was but fr. 100, and in case we are only partly on good terms, I should not want to accept more.

I could not finish that letter, however, and since then I have wanted to write to you but simply could not. Something terrible has happened, Theo, which hardly anybody here knows, or suspects, or may ever know, so for Heaven's sake keep it to yourself. To tell you everything, I would have to fill a volume—I can't do it. Miss X. has taken poison, in a moment of despair, when she had had an explanation with her family, and they slandered her and me, she became so upset that she did it (in a moment of decided *mania*, I think). Theo, I had already consulted the doctor about certain symptoms of hers, three days before, I had secretly warned her brother that I was afraid she would get brain fever, and that I was sorry to state that, in my eyes, the family X. acted extremely imprudently in speaking to her as they did. This had no effect, at least, no other than that they told me to wait two years, which I decidedly refused to do, saying that *if* there was a question of marriage it had to be very soon or not at all.

Well, Theo, you have read Mm. Bovary, do you remember the *first* Mm. Bovary who died in a nervous attack, here it was something like that, but complicated by having taken poison.

She had often said when we were quietly walking together, "I wish I could die now"—I had never paid any attention to it.



One morning, however, she slipped to the ground. At first I only thought it was weakness. But it became worse and worse. Well, now you understand the rest. It was strychnine she took, but the dose has been too small, or perhaps she took chloroform or laudanum with it as anodyne which would be the very counter-poison against strychnine. However, she has taken in time the counter-poison, which the doctor prescribed. She has been sent off immediately to a doctor in Utrecht, and is said to have gone abroad. I think it *probable* that she will get quite well again, but I am afraid there will follow a long time of nervous suffering for her—in what form, more or less serious, that is the question. But she is well taken care of now. You will understand how much I am cast down by this accident. It was such a terrible fright, boy, we were alone in the fields when I heard it. But luckily, the poison has at least lost its effect by now.....

But for Heaven's sake, what is the meaning of that standing, and of that religion which the respectable people keep up, oh, they are perfectly *absurd* things, which make of society a kind of lunatic asylum, a perfectly topsy-turvy world—oh, that mysticism. You will understand how these last few days, everything, everything passed through my mind, and how absorbed I was in this sad story. Now that she has tried this and failed, I think it has given her such a fright, that she will not easily try it a second time, the failure of a suicide is the best remedy against a future suicide. But if she gets brain fever or nervous fever, then . . .

But these first days, she has been doing rather well; only I am afraid of bad consequences. Theo, boy, I am so upset by it.

Good-bye, write soon, for I speak to *nobody* here,

Adieu,

Vincent.

Do you remember that first Mm. Bovary?

376

Dear Theo,

I must write you again, to tell you that I have fair hopes the patient will recover, though I expect the consequences, in the form of nervous trouble, will prove serious and of long duration.

Much, much depends here on surroundings and family, who, in fact, cannot do her a better turn than to treat her kindly, as if nothing had happened, or if they cannot do so, just to keep silent. To-day I have had a long letter from herself, and her brother tells me he also had tidings.

That the whole thing greatly agitates me, you will understand, when I tell you, how in that very letter I received to-day, she says "that not one of her family understands her real anguish of mind, that she tries to find distraction, but that she can't very well, and most of the time sits quietly in her room with a book, or something or other that she has got from me."

I suppose you understand, that if I wrote to you it reminded me of a passage out of Mm. Bovary, there is nothing here that has anything to do with the *second* Mm. Bovary, who is really the heroine of the book, but only the *first* Mm. Bovary, of whom there is little more than how and why she died, on hearing bad news concerning her fortune.

*Here* the cause of desperation was not the bad news concerning her fortune, but the way in which they reproached her, that she was *too old* and that sort of thing. Well, within a short time probably in a fortnight or three weeks, it will be decided whether or not a dangerous nervous disease will break out.

Good-bye, I am still quite upset by it. Don't speak about it to father and mother.

Yours,  
Vincent.

377

Dear Theo,

Just a word to tell you that I have been to Utrecht to visit her.

I also had an interview with the physician with whom she is staying, because I wanted to hear his advice, what I must or must not do, for the sake of the health and future of the patient, either continue our relation or break it off.

I want in this matter no other advice than that of a physician. And I have heard that her health is greatly shaken—though she is recovering—that in fact, according to the doctor, who has known

her from childhood, and who also was her mother's physician—she has *always* had a very frail constitution, and will always have, that for the moment there are *two* dangerous things, that she is too weak to marry at least now, but at the same time, a separation would be dangerous too.

So some time will have to pass over it, and then I shall receive a decided hint what will be the best for her, separation or not.

Of course, I shall always remain her friend, *mutually* we are perhaps *too much* attached to each other.

I spent almost the whole day with her then.

I just went to see Rappard, but he was not in town.

Last week, I designed the last of the six pictures for Hermans.

Wood-gatherers in the snow, so he has them all six to copy; when he will have finished this, and they are thoroughly dry, I will work them out into pictures. I wish you could see them all six together, in the panels for which they are destined. His copies are very correct as to the drawing, but I think his colour is bad, and as for mine, the warm grey often bituminous tone, in which I kept the whole thing, harmonizes with the woodwork and the style of the room. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

I think it deeply pathetic that this woman (while yet so *weak* and defeated by five or six other women that *she took poison*) says in a kind of triumph, as if she had gained a victory, and as if she had found *rest*: “I too have loved at last.”

She had never really loved before.

As for me, these days are sometimes full of anguish that makes me *sick*, that can neither be diverted nor stilled, but, in short, with forethought, *I have always respected her*, concerning a certain point that socially would have dishonoured her (though if I had wanted it, I had her in my power), so that socially she can perfectly maintain her position, and *if she understood it well*, she would have a splendid chance to take her revenge and get satisfaction from those very women who defeated her. And I will lend her a helping hand in this, but she does not always understand, or understands *too late*. Well.

It is a pity that I did not meet her *before*, for instance, ten years

ago. Now she gives me the impression of a Cremona violin, which has been spoilt by bad, bungling repairers.

And the condition in which she was when I met her proved to be rather too much damaged.

But originally it was a rare specimen of great value, and *even now*, she has, in spite of difficulties, great value.

The only thing I ever saw again of K. was a picture taken a year later; was she changed for the worse? On the contrary, *more interesting*.

*That disturbing the tranquillity of a woman*, as theological people call it (sometimes theologians *sans le savoir*), is sometimes *the breaking of stagnation or melancholy*, which steals upon many people, and is *worse than death itself*. To hurl them back to life, to love, some people think it terrible, and one must thoroughly weigh and balance how far one may go. But if one does it from other motives than egotism, well, then the women themselves will sometimes become *angry* and may even hate, instead of love, *que soit*.

But they will *not easily despise* the man who has done it. While they do despise the men who have extinguished the manliness in themselves. Well, those are the deep things of life. But whoever does not think about them or laughs at them, Mouret justly calls him "dupe" and in his anger even "bête."

378

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, thanks for the enclosure. Now just listen. It is all very well what you say, and as to scandal, I am now somewhat better prepared to meet it than I used to be.

No fear of father and mother leaving for instance.

Now there are people who say to me: "Why did you meddle *with her*," that's one fact. Now there are people who say to her: "Why did you meddle *with him*," that's another fact.

Both she and I have sorrow enough, and worries enough, but neither of us feels regret. Look here, I certainly believe, or know for sure, that she loves me. I certainly believe, or know for sure, that I love her, that feeling has been sincere.

Has it been foolish, etc? Perhaps so, *if you like*, but the *wise*

people who never do a foolish thing, are they not more foolish in my eyes than I am in theirs?

That's my answer to your argument, and other people's arguments.

All this I say simply *to explain*, not in anger or in spite.

You say that you like *Octave Mouret*, you say, you are like him; since last year I have also read the second volume, in which he pleases me much better than in the first.

Recently I heard somebody say that "Au Bonheur des Dames" would not greatly enhance the merit of Zola. I find in it the *greatest* and *best* things. I have looked it up again, and I copy for you some sayings by Octave Mouret. But for the enormous difference in circumstances, yes, direct difference in circumstances, I incline, however, more towards the direction of Mouret *than you* perhaps think, in the matter of my belief in women, and that one needs them, must love them. Mouret says: "*chez nous on aime la clientèle.*"

Please think this over, and remember my regret at your saying that you had "cooled down."

I spoke of the difference between Mouret and what I should want, and *yet* similarity. Look here, Mouret worships the modern Parisian woman, all right.

But Millet, Breton, *with the same passion*, worship the peasant woman.

Those two passions are one and the same.

Read Zola's description of a room with women in the twilight, women often already over thirty up to fifty, such a dim, mysterious corner.

I think it splendid, yes, *sublime*.

But to me, the Angelus of Millet is as sublime, *that* same twilight, that same infinite emotion, or that single figure of Breton in the Luxembourg or his: "Source."

You will say that I have no success—I don't care, to conquer or be conquered, in any case one is in emotion and action, and that is more the same thing than appears, or is said.

As to *this* woman in question, it remains a mystery to me how it must end, but neither she nor I will do *foolish* things.

I am afraid that the old bigotry will *again* benumb and freeze her, with that damned icy coldness, which *already once*, in the dis-



tant past, almost *killed* her, long years ago. Oh, I am no friend of the present Christianity, though its *Founder* was sublime, the present Christianity I know but too well. That icy coldness bewitched even me in my youth, but I take my revenge since, how? by worshipping the love which they, the theologians, call *sin*, by respecting a whore, etc., and *not* respecting many would-be respectable, pious ladies.

*Woman* is for one party always heresy and devilish. To me it is just the reverse. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

This is from Octave Mouret:

Mouret says:

“ Si tu te crois fort, parce que tu refuses d’être bête et de souffrir! Eh bien, alors tu n’es qu’une dupe, pas davantage.

“ Tu t’amuses ? ”

Mouret ne parut pas comprendre tout de suite, mais lorsqu’il se fut rappelé leurs conversations anciennes sur la bêtise vide et l’inutile torture de la vie, il répondit:

“ Sans doute, jamais je n’ai tant vécu. . . . Ah! mon vieux, ne te moques pas! Ce sont les heures les plus courtes où l’on meurt de souffrance.

Je la veux, je l’aurai . . . et, *si* elle m’échappe tu verras les choses que je ferai pour m’en guérir. Tu n’entends pas cette langue, mon vieux; autrement tu saurais que l’action contient en elle sa récompense; agir, créer, se battre contre les faits, les *vaincre* ou *être vaincu par eux*, toute la joie et toute la santé humaines sont là! Simple façon de s’étourdir, murmura l’autre.”

“ Eh bien, j’aime mieux m’étourdir, crever pour crever, *je préfère crever de passion, que de crever d’ennui.* ”

It is not only I who say this in spite of difficulties, but she too, that is why I saw something grand in her from the very beginning, but it is a confounded pity for her that in her youth she let herself be over thundered by disappointments, over thundered in this sense, that the orthodox religious family *thought they had to suppress* the

*active, aye, genial* element in her, and have made her passive to the utmost.

If only they had not broken her *in her youth!* or if they had only stopped at that, and if *five or six or more women, fighting against her alone,* had not driven her distracted!

*Just read in "L'Evangéliste" by Daudet about those women's intrigues, here they were different,* but yet of such a kind.

Oh, Theo, why should I change myself, I used to be very passive and very soft-hearted and quiet, I am so no more, but it is true, I am no longer a child now I feel myself sometimes.

Take Mauve, why is he quick-tempered and *far from meek* at times; I am not so far as he, but I too shall get farther than I am now.

I tell you, if one wants to be active, one must not be afraid of failures, one must not be afraid of making some mistakes. Many people think that they will become good by *doing no harm*, and that's a lie, and you yourself used to call it a lie.

It leads to stagnation, to mediocrity.

*Just dash something down,* if you see a blank canvas staring at you with a certain imbecility.

You do not know how paralysing it is, that staring of a blank canvas, which says to the painter: *you don't know anything*; the canvas stares at you like an idiot, and it hypnotizes some painters, so that they themselves become idiots. Many painters are afraid of the blank canvas, but the blank canvas is afraid of the real passionate painter, who dares—and who has once for all broken that spell of "you cannot." Life itself too always turns towards a man an infinitely vacant, discouraging, hopeless, blank side on which nothing is written, no more than on a blank canvas.

But however vacant and vain and *dead* life may present itself, the man of faith, of energy, of warmth, and who knows something, does not let himself be led astray by it.

He steps in, and acts, and builds up, in short he *breaks—ruins* they call it.—Let them talk, those cold theologians. Theo, I feel such damned pity for this woman, just because her age, and perhaps a disease of the liver and gall, so fatally threaten her. And this has been aggravated by the emotions. But we will see what can be done or what fatally cannot, however, I do not do anything without a very good physician, so I will do her no harm.

Dear Theo,

I could not write my last letter differently than I did. But know that it always strikes me to be rather a fatal difference between you and me, than one for which we ourselves are to blame.

You tell me within a short time there will be an exhibition of the work of Delacroix. All right. You will certainly see there a picture "La Barricade," which I know only from biographies of Delacroix. I believe it was painted in 1848. You also know a lithograph by de Lemud, I believe; if it is not by him, then by Daumier, also representing the barricade of 1848. I wish you could just imagine that you and I had lived in that year 1848, or some such period, for at the *coup d'état* of Napoleon, there was again something of the kind. I will not make any insinuations—that has never been my object—I try to make it clear to you in how far the difference that has sprung up between us is connected with the general drift of society, and, as such, is something quite different from expressly premeditated reproaches. So take that period 1848.

Who were opposed to each other then, that can be taken as types of all the rest? Guizot, minister of Louis Philippe, on one side, Michelet and Quinet with the students on the other.

I begin with Guizot and Louis Philippe, were they bad or tyrannical? Not exactly; in my opinion, they were people, like for instance father and grandfather, like old Goupil. In short, people with a very venerable appearance, deep—serious—but if one looks at them a little more closely and sharply, they have something gloomy, dull, stale, so much so that it makes one sick. Is this saying too much???

Except a difference of position, they have the same mind, the same character. Am I mistaken in this?

Now for instance Quinet or Michelet, or Victor Hugo (later), was the difference between them and their opponents very great? Yes, but seen superficially one would not have said so. I myself have formerly admired at the same time a book by Guizot and a book by Michelet. But in my case, as I got deeper into it, I found difference and *contrast*, which is stronger still.

In short, that the one comes to a dead end and disappears vaguely, and the other, on the contrary, has something infinite. Since then

much has happened. But my opinion is, if you and I had lived *then*, you would have been on the side of the Guizots, and I on the side of Michelet. And both remaining of consequence, with a certain melancholy, we might have stood as direct enemies opposite each other, for instance on such a barricade, you before it as a soldier of the government, I behind it, as revolutionist or rebel.

Now in 1884, *the ciphers happen to be the same only just reversed*, we are standing *again* opposite each other, though there are no barricades now. But minds that cannot agree are certainly still to be found.

“Le moulin n’y est plus, mais le vent y est encore.”

And in my opinion, we are in different camps opposite each other, that cannot be helped. And whether we like it or not, *you* must go on, *I* must go on. But as we are brothers, let us avoid killing each other for instance (in figurative meaning). But we cannot help each other as much as two people who are standing side by side in the same camp. No, if we come in each other’s neighbourhood, we would be within each other’s range. *My* sneers are bullets, not aimed at you who are my brother, but in general at the party to which you once and for all belong. Neither do I consider *your* sneers expressly aimed at me, but *you fire* at the barricade and think to gain merit by it, and I happen to be there.

Think this over if you like, for I do not believe you can say much against it, I can only say that I believe things are so.

I hope you will understand this what I say figuratively. Neither you nor I meddle with politics, but we live in the world, in society, and involuntarily ranks of people group themselves. Can the clouds help themselves whether they belong to one thunder shower or to another? whether they carry positive or negative electricity? now it is also true that men are no clouds. As an individual, one is a part of whole humanity. That humanity is divided into parties. In how far is it one’s own free will, in how far is it the fatality of circumstances, that makes one belong to one party or to its opposite?

Well, then it was “’48, now it is ’84,” “le moulin n’y est plus, mais le vent y est encore.” But try to know for yourself where you really belong, as I try to know that for myself. Good-bye,

Vincent,

Dear Theo,

Enclosed I am sending you two photographs, later on you will get two more of weavers.

I intended to have twelve photographs taken—a series of Brabant scenes, among which are the six I am making for Hermans.

I intended to send them to some illustrated papers, to try to get some work, or at least to become known.

But I have given up the idea, as the photographer only gives proofs, which do not or hardly render the real chiaroscuro, besides he retouches much and badly, and yet very often leaves dark what is light in the picture, and the reverse.

However, I will have another proof taken of the weavers in carte-de-visite only, because being so far away from the illustrated papers here, I must find a means to get connections in another way than in words.

This winter I hope to make several drawings, just of the same fore-mentioned compositions, and to send them for instance, to the *London News*, which if you have noticed it, is now often better than the *Graphic*, and among others has just reproduced a very beautiful Frank Holl, and a beautiful landscape with sheep. Of late I have just been working very hard, I believe together with other emotions, I have even over-worked myself. For I am in a melancholy mood, and all these things together have upset me in such a way that there are many days when I am almost paralysed.

I cannot eat, and I cannot sleep, that is to say not enough, and that makes one weak.

But I shall get over it again, just because I have fairly good news from Utrecht.

But I am still very anxious, because I am afraid it will be a long time before she has quite recovered.

Perhaps it will be a long time for me too, before I get over it. I always regret, Theo, that I am standing on one side of a certain barricade, you on the other, which barricade is not actually visible any more *on the pavement*, but socially certainly does exist, and will continue to do so.

In that lithograph by Daumier or Lemud, by whoever of the two it may be, the principal subject is a person whose story I remember.



There were two brothers, and they were standing *on the same side*, and both were killed one after the other, *for the same cause*.

That might have been in our case, but now I am almost sure it will never happen. I, for my part, know well enough that the future will always remain very difficult for me, and I am almost sure that I shall never in the future be what people call *prosperous*.

I think that father also feels it is rather fatality than downright intention, when there is sometimes such decided difference of opinion between us. But I wish that I didn't *hit* other people, that father had not been standing *right* before me at times. Well, sometimes I think that at all events painting can prevent worse things, and that otherwise it would be still worse. For the future, I have no other plans now than to continue my Brabant subjects, till I am so far that I can sell them in Belgium, for instance, or elsewhere.

Then, when I shall have some firm footing, I should like to go back once again to the miners.

I ask from you, not that you sympathize with my work, but whenever you know of some resources, tell me so. Rappard has been both in Drenthe and again at Terschelling, and seems to have had a good crop of studies. Probably he will come here again in October for some time. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

The picture of the sower is as large as that of the spinster, the colour of the soil is neutral, but just a little pink, farther on, light green. The blouse of the man is blue, and his drawers brown. The gaiters are dirty linen, I think in the picture the head stands out better against the sky than in the photograph.

Just listen, Theo, as to that barricade, you know there has been a time in my life when I also stood on the side of the Guizots, etc.

But as soon as I had enough of it, you know how I turned away with energy and persistence.

The younger people *now do not want me* however; all right, *I don't care*; as men, and as painters, I like the generation of about '48 better than those of '84, but from those of '48 *not* the Guizots, but the revolutionaries, Michelet—and also *the peasant painters* of Barbizon.

Dear Theo,

Here are two photographs of the weavers—next week I hope to send you two more designs for Hermans' decorations.

I just want to tell you that this winter, perhaps next month, I intend to go away from here for a time, I have thought of Antwerp—I have thought of the Hague.

But the last few days I have thought of something that is perhaps better still. In the first place, I want now at all events, some city life, some change of surroundings, having been for a full year or more either in Drenthe or at Nuenen. And I believe this will be a good distraction for me, for my spirits in general, which especially of late have not been and could not be, as cheerful as I should like.

Look here now, at Bois-le-Duc there lives the sculptor Stracké, who is at the same time director of the Drawing Academy there. I saw a *terre coite* of a pupil of his, and heard on that occasion that Stracké is not at all unkind or indifferent to anyone who practises art in this neighbourhood. That at Bois-le-Duc he has several models for the academy, and that there are people to whom he affords the opportunity to draw from the nude or to model in clay.

Probably however, one will have to *pay the model* oneself, but that is not so very expensive, and then one has a good room for which one does not pay *anything*. I am going to see for myself how things are, and then it is not impossible that, like for instance Breitner went to Cormon, I shall go to Stracké. It is in the neighbourhood, and would be the cheapest thing too.

I have bought a very beautiful book on anatomy: "Anatomy for Artists," by John Marshall. It was in fact very expensive, but it will be of use to me all my life, for it is very good. Also I have what they use at *l'Ecole des Beaux Arts*, and what they use at Antwerp.

But such things make great gaps in my pocket. I tell you this only to make you for Heaven's sake understand that, when I did not pay father and mother for my board, as long as I stay here, this is not because I do not *want* to pay, but because I have had many expenses, which I, for my part don't consider superfluous. The key to *many* things is the thorough knowledge of the human body, but it decidedly costs money to learn it. Besides, I think that *colour*, that *chiaroscuro*, that *perspective*, that *tone* and that

drawing, in short, everything has indeed fixed laws, which one must, and can study, like chemistry or algebra. This is *by far not* the easiest view of things, and somebody who says: "Oh, one must know it all by nature," takes it very easily indeed. *If* that were sufficient! But it is not sufficient, for even if one knows ever so much *by instinct*, that is just the reason to try ever so hard to come from *instinct* to *reason*. That's what I think.

You must not imagine that I have earned anything by doing that work for Hermans; the first day I got two bills for the stretchers, canvases and a number of tubes, which amounted to *more* than I received from him to pay them. I told him that I did not want these bills to stand, and if he wanted to have them put in his name, or if he would pay me something in advance. Oh no, he said, *let it stand, that need not be paid at once*. I said: *yes, it must be paid at once*. Then he gave me fr. 25.

Then came still all my expenses for models, not counting my time, work, etc., but since then, I have not seen any of his money, *neither have I asked for it*. On the contrary, because my work pleased him from first to last, I consider myself already sufficiently paid, if needs be. Besides, the pictures remain my property, and I must judge for myself, what I am willing to lay out on them. But enough of this, since those stretchers, canvases, etc., I have had at least fr. 20 expenses, perhaps even more, and have not even got them back. But the man is satisfied and pleased with me. Is it then good policy to ask for money? One must be very careful in this, in my opinion, *just when people are satisfied, one must rather lower the price than raise it*. Especially when, after all, the sum is not so considerable, that the fact of receiving it or not puts much weight on the scale. If I succeed, it will be perhaps for the very reason that I work cheaper than others, and by making it easy for the amateurs.

As to Hermans, *he is very good*, and a man with whom to remain on good terms, and he is certainly rich, but—has always been rather stingy than generous. Quite different from a real miser, *but after all, I earn less, much less than nothing*.

But notwithstanding this, I, for my part, have been very kind and obliging to him. I find in him a very pleasant, jovial *friend*, and it is really touching to see how a man of sixty tries hard to learn to paint with the same youthful enthusiasm as if he were twenty.

What he makes is not beautiful, but he works hard, and has already copied four of my six compositions, in quite a different sentiment, and it has something mediæval, something like the peasant Breughel.

You told me once that I should always be isolated, I don't believe it, there you are decidedly mistaken in my character.

And I do not at all intend to think and live less passionately than I do. By no means—I may meet with rebuffs, I may often be mistaken—often be wrong—but that only as far as it goes—at bottom, I am not wrong.

They are neither the best pictures, nor the best people, that have no faults or *partis pris*.

And I repeat, though these times may seem tame, they are not so indeed. I also positively contradict that my assertion of certain parties being still as strongly opposed to each other in '84 as in '48, would be *exaggerated*. It is *something quite different* from that ditch of yours, I assure you—I am speaking rather of the parties now, than exactly of you and me, but you and I also belong *somewhere* don't we, stand either on the right or on the left, whether we are *conscious* of it or not.

I for my part, have at all events, a *parti pris* if you like, and if you think you, for your part, can manage to stand neither on the right nor on the left, I take the liberty of doubting most strongly the practicability of it. And especially the practical use.

I have had a fairly good letter from Utrecht, she has recovered in so far that she can go to the Hague for a time. But I am still far from at ease about her. The tone of her letters is much more self-conscious, much more correct, and less prejudiced than when I first knew her. At the same time, something like the wail of a bird whose nest has been robbed; towards society she is perhaps less indignant than I am, but she too, sees in it "the boys who rob the nests," who do it for fun and laugh about it. As to what I call barricade and you call ditch, it cannot be helped, but there is an old civilization that, in my opinion, goes under by its own fault—there is a new civilization which has been born, and grows, and will grow further.

In short, there are *revolutionary* and *anti-revolutionary* principles.

Now I ask you, whether you yourself have not often noticed that the policy of floating between the old and the new is not

tenable? Just think this over. Sooner or later it ends with one's standing frankly either to the right or to the left.

*It is no ditch.* And I repeat, then it was '48, now it is '84; then there was a barricade of paving stones—now it is not of stones, but a barricade as to the incompatibility of old and new, oh, it certainly is there in '84 as well as in '48. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(22nd October '84.)

Here are two more cartes-de-visite, to give you an idea of that decoration for Hermans, of which these two paintings form a part.

Rappard is here at present, and sends his compliments. He has made a very beautiful study of a girl's head, and one of a farmyard, and two small ones of ox-wagons. And he intends to make several more that will follow.

I am working on a figure of a shepherd with a wide cloak, which is of the same size as the spinning woman.

And besides, a study of two pollard-willows, with the yellow leaves of poplars behind, and a glimpse of the fields.

It is extraordinarily beautiful here at present, with the autumn effects. In a fortnight's time we shall have the real *chûte des feuilles* when all the leaves on the trees fall off in a few days.

If I may have some luck with that shepherd, it will become a figure in which there shall be something of the *very old Brabant*. In short, it is not ready yet, and we shall see how it turns out.

I think you might just have answered in a few words to what I last wrote, if only to clear up your own ideas perhaps. I, for my part, in spite of much old and new sorrow, feel less and less doubt about my own future, both as to my work and as to myself.

But I know that in both respects I shall have a hard fight, that both my work and myself will meet with much opposition, will make a bad impression in *many* cases, though *not in all*.

And as to my work, every day I become keener on it, and I get back my high spirits, as if *I were again in the twenties*.

I must by all means manage to go to Antwerp some time; in



the past I have often enough sold things which the authorities had declared to be unsaleable. If I *wanted* to sell a thing then, it did not always fall through, if I really wanted someone to take a certain thing. And perhaps you are right, that I had better find my own way for my work, and become my own dealer in short. Good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(October '84.)

Enclosed you will find a few smaller photos from the studies of which you have already the larger ones.

I send them that you may have something to show of my work, if an occasion presents itself.

Rappard is still here, and will stay another week, as he is head over ears in his work.

He is painting spinners and several study heads, he has already made about ten studies, all of which I like.

We have been talking a good deal about impressionism. I think that you would range his work under that head. But here in Holland it is rather difficult to find out what impressionism really means.

But both he and I are very interested in the tendencies of the present day. And it is a fact that unexpected, new conceptions begin to arise. That pictures are being painted in quite a different tone than some years ago. The last thing I made, is rather a large study of an avenue of poplars, with yellow autumn leaves, the sun casting, here and there, sparkling spots on the fallen leaves on the ground, alternated by the long-cast shadows of the stems. At the end of the road is a small cottage, and over it all the blue sky through the autumn leaves.

I think that in a year, if I spend that year again painting much and constantly, I shall change much in method of painting and in colour, and that I shall become rather darker than lighter.

Rappard's work too has changed to a much lower gamut. The heads he paints at present remind, as to effect, of certain study



heads by Courbet for instance. But it is deucedly well done I can assure you.

In consequence of things I talked over with him, it may be that I shall rather stay here and work on here, than go elsewhere. His visit has given me again new ideas for my own work, and there are so many things in my mind which I should like to make that, after all, I can hardly put off setting to work on them. ° Besides, I want to settle my bills for colours before New Year, and can't afford any extra expenses.

For if I went to Antwerp, of course I should want to work hard there, and should need models, which I am afraid would be too expensive for the moment.

But in general, Rappard too advises me to do it, not now at once, but after having painted here for a few months more, then to try to get a *pied-à-terre* there, to paint some studies from the nude. But if first I paint about thirty study heads here, I shall be able to profit more from Antwerp, and those thirty heads I start now, or rather, I have done so already, with a large bust of a shepherd.

Rappard has done the same this summer in Drenthe, and on Terschelling, and it has greatly helped him on.

I just saw a reproduction after Lhermitte: "Le Cabaret," two labourers and a woman, do you know it?

Of late, Rappard and I have made long excursions, and visited house after house; we have seen the most beautiful things, just because of the splendid autumn effects. And we have also discovered new models.

Perhaps some more painters will come in this neighbourhood next year. I should be glad, for one must not be too long at a stretch without seeing any other painters. Well—as to that—I am sure to get some new acquaintances ere long. Best regards, also from Rappard.

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I received your letter and thank you for it, and for the enclosure. When you write that you are standing again before your bad half-

year, for I think it lasts half a year, that is not exactly pleasant news for you to write, nor for me to receive.

But we must try to remedy it, try to make it better for both of us.

Before I received your letter and its enclosure, I had already done a thing which I don't think you will approve of, but I am sorry to say, that I do not much mind your opinion about it. I have once more tried to renew the relations with Mauve and, if possible, also with Tersteeg. I do not know if I shall succeed, but I must have freer scope, for having been *a full year and longer* quite without any connection with the world of art, as I have, notwithstanding all goodwill, one comes to a dead end and must renew oneself.

It is perfectly true what you say: "that if I made good pictures it is more likely I shall achieve something, than by discussing revolutionary questions." I find this so true that, while you wrote this, I was just taking steps to promote the direct progress of my work, by asking to be allowed to paint again some studies in Mauve's studio.

In your letter, the above-quoted sentence is followed directly by the question: if I can perhaps point out to you some new ideas about the question of reform in the art trade.

Shall I point out one to you, which is in your, as well as in my, personal interest, don't bother about the thing at large, back my advances to Mauve and Tersteeg.

Help me to get afloat, and to earn money, not only by sending your money, but also by your influence, and more sympathy, and a more unalloyed friendship. There is strength enough in me to accomplish something, and to earn too. And then—as you say—if I make progress in my painting, and gain a good independent position, I shall be worth more than I am now.

Then later on, when I shall be somewhat better off, I shall be glad to try to give you new hints about that question of reform in art trade, about which I certainly have my own ideas, arising from my own experience of what hinders the progress of the painters, and what kind of things sometimes make a painter's life unbearable.

I don't think it the right moment now to write much about it. I only say this, if *you* or *I* need money to make progress, and if for

the moment we can only work at half-speed, because of financial reasons, we must try to get that money and plod on till we have it. *Not argue*: "we are standing before a half-year that will be financially bad, so make the best of it." What one *must* have, *can* be found.

I have written to Mauve and to Tersteeg. If you back me, so much the better.

Yours,  
Vincent.

Don't misunderstand me, however, I have not written in a complaining tone to Mauve or to Tersteeg. On the contrary, but I said as strongly as I could: give me another opportunity to make a few studies at Mauve's!

That is what I asked, nothing else, and that is the only thing I need. In the financial question, they must not even be mixed. If I can't spare it myself, you must do your very utmost to send me an extra fr. 100, for I am not going for long. If you absolutely cannot spare it, father must try to advance the money. I will harp upon it till Mauve gives in.

If I fail alone, we must ask Mauve together till he gives in. Then, after that, I shall have gained some hints to correct my work here and to improve it. And I shall have again a *pied-à-terre* with a solid, serious painter, and then I warrant you, something will happen ere long, either I shall exhibit or I shall sell.

Now do give me an answer to this.

It is quite possible, of course, that I shall not hear anything, either from Mauve or from Tersteeg.

If I hear anything I will let you know at once. And if they don't answer, it must be repeated, either by me alone, or by both of us, just as you like. Since my first meeting with Mauve, I have not been grinding in vain on the elements of drawing, as well as of colour, and of painter's technique.

I have learned new things, but I need Mauve or somebody else, who is very clever, not to make me think much of myself, but to give me some courage, which oozes away if things *drag* too long. Forward—and what the devil do I care if I fail—if I fail, then I'll try again.



It is very true that this year I have spent in the first place for my work, in the second for myself, more than I did last year. I am not sorry for it, however, I have also made progress, just in the things that will help to redress matters in painting,—what I regret is only that I could not spend a few hundred guilders *more*. What I have gained by it is, that for instance in one morning, I now easily brush a head from the model, and that at last my colour is becoming more solid, and more correct, and there comes more character in my technique.

Now I can very well understand that my saying: I needed money for it and need it still—is criticized. But it cannot be denied that, for a painter's profession, one needs a trading capital as well as for the simple trade of a shoemaker for instance. A trading capital that after a couple of years can yield very good interest, at least, to begin with, for instance 20%, and can be redeemed later on.

To attain that result I must work hard, but, in my opinion, you on your side might do what you formerly said you would do: take my part—not in a neutral way, but in an energetic, positive way.

Look here now—for my study I must paint 50 heads, just because I have got the knack of them. As soon as possible and one after the other. I have calculated, but *without* extra, it is not possible to work with that vigour, which as far as pains and exertion go, I would willingly spend on it. I had to buy an overcoat, just because I am more particular about my clothes than formerly, and other things; the bills for colours also take *much* from what I get, so that in order to carry out my plans in a short time, working at full speed (instead of half-speed for economy's sake, which never can be real economy), I must manage to get an extra fr. 100. In order to win over Tersteeg and Mauve, I *must* do something decidedly energetic, having now broached the matter. Is it absolutely impossible now for you to send it me? I *must* strike the iron now it is *hot*; but dear brother and friend, *stir up the fire*.

Adieu.

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,<sup>1</sup>

(November '84.)

.....  
 Though it has been freezing pretty hard here for the last few days, I am still at work out-of-doors, on a rather large study (more than one metre) of an old water-mill at Gennepe, on the other side of Eindhoven.

I want to finish it quite out-of-doors, but it will certainly be the last I shall paint out-of-doors this year.

Since I wrote to you, I have also been working on other studies, among others, two heads of polder-men.

I have now three people in Eindhoven who want to learn to paint, and whom I am teaching to paint still-life.

I can safely say, that since your visit, I have made progress in the technique of painting, and in colour. And that I shall continue to do so, "il y a les premiers pas qui coûtent" in painting; afterwards it is easier, and I have some trumps in hand. And I think tricks are to be made with them.

You know that I took steps to make up with Mauve and Tersteeg for what happened in the past.

I am not sorry I did so.

But they have refused to have anything to do with me, very "pertinently" refused. This does not discourage me.

I consider it as if I had sent a picture to an exhibition, and it had been refused.

At first one must have opposition a few times.

So I repeat, I am not sorry for the advances I made, and shall probably repeat them, not at once, but after not too long a time.

Now I must tell you that I should be very glad if you did not keep quite neutral in this, but, on the contrary, if you would help me to get what I want. I have owned myself to be in the wrong, not only to Mauve, but also to Tersteeg. I did it the readier, because I believe they will afterwards see for themselves that, on their side, they have absolutely misunderstood some things. What they do not see as yet.

I do not know how you have taken my last letter, which was not unkindly meant. My affairs *can prosper* and in the interest

<sup>1</sup> A portion of this letter is missing.

of us both, I wish we could concentrate all the power we can dispose of.

I sent both Tersteeg and Mauve, a few words in answer to their refusal, to tell them that: "I perhaps agreed with Tersteeg, it was better for me to look for new friends than to try to renew old relations, that this was exactly my own idea too, but that, except and besides that, I had enough confidence in the future, not easily to give up the renewing of even old relations, perhaps even better than before."

This has been my answer to Tersteeg, and it is also my answer to you. You may find this pedantic if you like, but it is not so, it was for serious, practical reasons that I pointed this out to you before, and again do so now. M. X. will come back to Nuenen one of these days, we always remained good friends, and it is on my instigation that she did not yield to her sisters, who showed her they had rather she stayed away.

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Dear Theo,

Yesterday I just brought home that study of the water-mill at Gennep, which I painted with pleasure, and which has procured me a new friend in Eindhoven, who wants to learn to paint by all means, and to whom I paid a visit, when we set to work at once.<sup>1</sup> So that very evening he had brushed a still-life, and he has promised me he will try to paint about thirty of them this winter, which I will come and look at now and then, and help him to make. He is a tanner, who has time and money, and is about forty years old, so he has more chances than Hermans, who wonderfully keeps his ambition, however, and works just as hard as he did the first days, namely, gives almost *all* his time to it. I think this new fellow will soon get an eye for colour.

I intend, however, to make the people gradually pay something, not in money, but by telling them, you must give me *tubes of paint*. For I want to paint much—continually, and I want to manage so

<sup>1</sup> This new friend was Anton Kerssemakers, who has published his "reminiscences" of Vincent in the weekly paper the *Amsterdammer* of 14th and 21st April, 1912.

that I need not work any longer at *half-speed*, but can paint from morning till night.

You must not suppose that I am so eager for people to approve of my work and my actions in general. On the contrary, for the moment, for instance, I am almost more glad that Mauve and Tersteeg have refused me than if it had been the reverse. Understand me well! it is because I feel the power within me to win them over after all, notwithstanding everything.

I should not have applied to them again, if I didn't feel that I had gained a fixed point by drudging these last years on the ABC of drawing and painting—drudging harder than they can imagine—and I should not have started a new fight, if I didn't feel sure of a *possibility* to win it.

Of the *certainty* to win it I am not sure, however, but I dare speculate on its chance, so I am not the worse for it, now that I have begun to appeal to the public.

In the very fight I shall feel my strength grow, and by criticism, by ill will, even by opposition, I shall learn more than by resignation. But these things I mentioned to you—I must insist, decidedly insist on. I have set myself the task to make a certain number of studies, for which I lack the money, no matter how I calculate, and yet for no reason on earth may I put them off. New Year is at hand, about that time I have to pay a few things, and I have already paid off some this month. But in this way I run short of money for my work, and if I don't find an extra, I shall lose a month's work, and, under the circumstances, that *may* not be, and do try your very utmost to obtain an extra fr. 100 for me.

I, for my part, will also try to get a contribution in colours, from the people to whom I give lessons.

I hope you will feel that just because of my appeal to Mauve and Tersteeg and their refusing,—within a very short time—I must show directly or indirectly, I have again accomplished something, and that all energy must now be concentrated, and that work must be done *full speed*, though it might turn out a little more expensive. That *will* be refunded, and I stick to what I said, in the future we must manage to get at least good interest on the invested capital. Since you were here, a change has come in my colour, which I already had a presentiment of when you were here, and you will see that, *with some more studies, those about which I write now,*

*which must be finished in a couple of months*, will prove undoubtedly that, just in the matter of colour, I have achieved something. It is not my fault, but at the moment I am short of money, just because I have painted more than I could really afford, and there *can* be no economizing now, for by striking the iron while it is hot we can gain important points. I remember having said in my last letter: "that I no longer mind your opinion," I don't mean that as rudely as it sounds, I only mean that, in some respects I have decided to push on, rather with passion than with prudence, because this is more in my character, and, after all, I cannot put up with those cool calculations. And yet *I calculate too*. The extra I ask, I don't ask it at once, but look here what I mean. Try to send fr. 20 extra about 20th November, then 1st December the ordinary amount, about 20th December another fr. 20 extra, and in January the same. Then I shall be able to make the ends of those months meet, and need not stop for days when the work requires my losing no moment.

If it can be a little more, so much the better, but try at least to do what I just asked.

And I for my part can perhaps get something in the form of tubes of colour from that new acquaintance.

I don't think I am mistaken in regard to Tersteeg and Mauve, when I venture to say there is certainly a chance of getting at them, and winning them over. They may be won over by colour, and by working hard. I see a chance of giving them a convincing proof that I have a notion of, and sentiment for colour. And then portraits are more and more in demand, and there are not so very many who can make them, and I want to try to learn to paint a head with character, I have just got enthusiastic about it of late, because my notion of colour has become more firm. You need not meddle at once in that question with Tersteeg and Mauve, *spare yourself rather*, but if for instance I have those 50 heads, which I am going to make, ready at the end of January, then it might be well if *you unexpectedly* said a few words to them.

Hermans has, after all, positively promised to pay me a trip somewhere, but with a return ticket. If I want to go to Antwerp, I can keep him to his word, and this winter I will manage to try and get some connections there, though that may not succeed either the first time.



Good-bye, be sure to send me fr. 20 about 20th November, to keep me provided till the end of this month. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I suppose you know already that father has refused the living at Helvoirt.

I was not indifferent to the decision, as in no case should I have gone with them to Helvoirt, and should either have stayed here in my studio or have gone to Antwerp. Now, as far as I can see, it is, and will be, the best for me simply to go on as I am doing, and to stay here.

Of late I have really not been doing so badly. It is true that I can't have any financial success with my work here, but I am making really good friends here, who I believe will become still better.

Last week I painted still-life day after day, with the people who paint at Eindhoven.

That new acquaintance, the tanner of whom I told you, applies himself wonderfully. But I, for my part, must do something in return to keep up the friendship. But I don't see I am the loser by it, as I work with more animation when I have some conversation.

Hermans has so many beautiful things, old jars and other antiques, that I want to ask you if I could oblige you by painting for your room a still-life of some of these objects, for instance of Gothic things—those which I made with Hermans till now are more simple. But just to-day, he told me that if I wanted to paint for myself a picture of things that were still too difficult for him, I could take them with me to the studio. Please give me an answer to this, and if you like it, I shall make one for you, and I will pick out the best things. I have finished a little one already. As to my asking you to send me another fr. 20 before the end of this month, I hope you will do so.

I am getting on pretty well, but my expenses do not become less, but just by working very hard now, I am making progress.

Do help me by sending what I ask, if it is in the least possible. Otherwise these last days of the month will be very hard for me and the work will suffer more than is necessary.

And I will give it you back in my work. That's all I can say about it.

At all events, I will ask for those things from Hermans, and make something for you, you will see for yourself what I told you about the colour, that it is improving. I have also started another water-colour of the water-mill.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I *know* that it is a hard time for you, but we must push on, and sure enough there will come a change for the better.

388

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and the enclosure, and also for what I still received for St. Nicholas. . . .

I let people say and think of me what they like, more than you perhaps suppose, but be sure of this, when a thing turns out wrong, that's not a reason for me to admit that I ought not to have begun it, on the contrary, if it fails many a time it is a reason for me to try again, if the very same thing is not possible yet always again in the same direction, as my views are well-considered and calculated, and in my opinion have their *raison d'être*.

To me personally, an important difference between *before* and *after* the revolution—is the change in social position of women and the collaboration they want between men and women, with equal rights, equal freedom.

But I can find neither the words nor the time, nor the mind, to go deeper into this. Enough, the conventional morals are in my opinion quite *wrong*, and I hope they will be *changed* and *renewed* by time. . . .

The drawback of painting is the bill for colours. And it worries me a good deal at the moment. From the 40 guilders you sent me,

I paid some at once. Besides that, I paid the carpenter, etc. So that, if there remained to you just fr. 100 after deducting what you had to pay, to me there remained not quite fr. 25; now it is true for the moment I have not *to live* on it as you have, but I must paint with it a whole month, what with models, what with colours is in fact impossible.

And I have the same pleasant prospect for January too, when I have again things to pay. So the reason why I complain, and why I said that I really needed an extra now, not later, was that I want for Heaven's sake to go on working, if I cannot do so for financial reasons, it makes me very unhappy. And I cannot blame only myself for it, for the very reason that my expenses are caused not by extravagance, but by working.

I cannot bother about what people think of me, *to get on*, that's what I have to think of.

So I go my own way with a certain obstinacy, believing in some things, and not believing in others.

You rightly care for your position, don't you? for the progress or non-success, the prospering or the failure of your business. Know it well, that with certainly no less motives than for which you stand by yours, I stand by my profession. And without proceeding exactly very delicately, I must and will push on.

I certainly intend to keep my studio here, like for instance, Stengelin does, who has one on the moors of Drenthe, though he eventually lives in another place. I have rented it as a kind of refuge, and as such, it will remain of use to me. To take rooms in Eindhoven would be downright nonsense, I cannot even think of it.

Later on, to take a room in Antwerp, all right, that's my intention, but, in the first place, I have no money for it now, and in the second, I first want to paint rather a large number of heads, which will go more smoothly the better I can pay the models.

But, as you say, things are not exactly favourable for this.

Try to help me, that I needn't lose time, that I can work readily on, and I shall keep on till I am so far, that in Antwerp people will give me work in exchange for board and lodging and paint. Proudhon writes "*la femme est la désolation du juste*," but would not the answer to this be—"le juste est la désolation de la femme"? May-be.

Perhaps one also might say: "*l'artiste est la désolation du financier*," and its reverse: "*le financier est la désolation de l'artiste*."

Yours,

Vincent.

389

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find a few scratches of the heads I am working on, I scratched them in a hurry, and from memory.

I told you how little money was left for this month, you know how last month it was about the same.

The fact is that now, more than ever, I paint as long as I have money for models.

Those last days of the month, when sometimes I *must stop* things which I want to finish, I can't tell you how impatient and how wretched it makes me.

I must make about fifty of those heads while I am still here, and while I can get during the winter months, relatively easily, all kinds of models. But now—if I don't take care, the winter months will pass, without my making as many as I want and are necessary.

That's the reason why I so harp on it, and must urge you most strongly to try, if only half possible, to cover my expenses of the end of this month.

I do not need much, fr. 20 or fr. 30 will pretty well see me through.

They are for the moment worth more to me than fr. 50 extra later.

By working on steadily, those fifty heads will be finished this winter. But they need so much work and drudgery that I can't spare a day.

And I hope it will be a means to make an arrangement between you and me, which is better for both parties than the present one.

Good-bye, if you have borrowed or can borrow, help me with it. As I didn't want to have all my bills for colours at the end of the year, I have already paid a part this month, as I told you. But

that the work should suffer under it, is a thing I cannot bear. I received from Rappard a series of drawings by Renouard "Le Monde judiciaire," types of lawyers, criminals, etc. I do not know if you have noticed them, I like them very much. And I think he is one of the genuine stock of the Daumiers and the Gavarnis.

Yours,

Vincent.

390

Dear Theo,

I am working very hard on the series of heads from the people, which I have set myself to make. I just enclose a little scratch of the last one, in the evening I generally scratch them from memory on a little scrap of paper, this is one of them.

Perhaps I will make them afterwards in water-colour too. But first I must paint them.—Now just listen.—Do you remember how in the very beginning, I always spoke to you about my great respect and sympathy for the work of Father de Groux? Of late I think of him *more than ever*. One must not see of him only his historical pictures, though these also are very good, neither in the first place a few pictures with the sentiment of, for instance, the author Conscience. But one must see his "Le Bénédicité," "Le Pélerinage," "Le Banc des Pauvres" and above all, above all, the simple Brabant types. De Groux is appreciated as little as, for instance, Thys Maris. He is different though, but this they have in common, that they have met with violent opposition.

In these days—whether the public is wiser now I can't tell, but this much I know, that it is not at all superfluous to weigh seriously one's thoughts and one's actions.

And at this very moment, I could tell you some new names of people that hammer again on the same old anvil on which de Groux has hammered. If it had pleased de Groux at that time to dress his Brabant characters in mediæval costumes, he would have run parallel with Leys in genius, and also in fortune.

However, he did not do so, and *now*, years afterwards, there is a considerable reaction on that mediævalism, though Leys always remains Leys and Thys Maris, Thys Maris, and Victor Hugo's Notre Dame, Notre Dame.



But the realism *not wanted* then, is *in demand* now, and there is more need of it than ever.

The realism that has character and a serious sentiment.

I can tell you that for my part I will try to keep a straight course, and will paint the most simple, the most common things.

For pity's sake, how is it possible that you do not seem able or willing to understand, that by having fixed my studio here, and keeping it here for the present, I have made it possible to have money enough for painting, and if I had done otherwise, it would have been a failure for myself as well as for others. If I had not done so I would have had to drudge at least three years more, before I had definitely overcome the difficulties of colour and tone, just because of the expenses. It is now just a year ago since I came here, driven by necessity. It is certainly not for my *pleasure* that I live here at home, but for my painting, and this being so, I think it a great mistake of yours if you would rob me of an opportunity, if I left here *now*, before I had found something else. For my painting I must stay here somewhat longer still, then as soon as I have made more definite progress, I am willing to go anywhere, where I shall earn the same money that I have here.

To be put back, that is what I do not need or deserve, neither do I feel the least inclination for it, you see.

And to try to get rid of you, that is what I never did, but where you showed me too clearly how little chance there was of our doing real business together, I do accept it for the future, that is true.

Know this once and for all, when I ask you for money, I do not ask it for *nothing*, the work which I make with it is at your disposal, and if *now* I am in arrears, I am on the right road to get in advance even.

I write this once more, for the same reason as I did the former letters; I shall be quite at bay at the end of the month, for I have only enough for two or three days to pay my model.

And I am wretched that I shall again be handicapped for ten or twelve days this month.

And most seriously I repeat, can you not find a way to help me to fr. 20, for instance, to cover those last days? What I mind most, is the time I should otherwise lose by it. Good-bye.

Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Thanks for what you sent me. I appreciate your having done so, because so much depends on working hard, during those winter months when it is easier to get models.

In two or three days you will receive twelve little pen and ink drawings, from study heads.

I feel after all, most in my element when I am working at the figure, and there also seems to me to be more character in, for instance, those heads I already made at the Hague, and in some other figures, than in the other things I made. And perhaps it will be wise to concentrate myself more exclusively on the figure.

But the figure always stands in some surroundings, and involuntarily one is led to make those surroundings too, because one cannot dispense with them.

Mother wants to add something to this letter, so I will be short, as I am sending you those pen drawings one of these days.

I do not know yet what I shall do with those heads, but I will derive the composition from the characters themselves.

But I do know quite well why I made them, and at what I aim in general. I am longing to see, sooner or later, that picture which you have received.<sup>1</sup>

The legend itself I do not understand exactly what it means to say.

I do not understand it, because you say the figure is Dantesque, but it is the symbol of an evil spirit which lures people in the abyss.

Surely these two things can hardly go together, for the sober, severe figure of Dante, full of indignation and protest against what he had seen happening, in protest against the terrible mediæval abuses and prejudices, is certainly one of the most sincere, honest, noble ones, one can imagine. About Dante it was said: "*voilà celui qui va à l'enfer et qui en revient*," it is quite a different thing *to enter it and to come back again*, than the devilish *luring others into it*.

Consequently, a Dantesque figure cannot be made to act a devilish part without the greatest misconstruction of character.

<sup>1</sup> He means a picture of the Swedish painter Josephon—the study for his afterwards famous picture: the "Waternix."

And the silhouette of a Mefisto is mighty different from that of Dante.

About Giotto they wrote in his time: "le premier il mit 'la bonté' dans l'expression des têtes humaines." Giotto painted Dante, and with much sentiment, as you know, for you remember the old portrait. From which I draw the conclusion that the expression of Dante, however sad and melancholy it may be, is essentially an expression of something infinitely good and tender. So I cannot imagine Satan or Mefisto having anything Dantesque about them. A reason the more why I am curious to see, some day, how the picture really is.

My best wishes for the New Year.

Yours,  
Vincent.

392

Dear Theo,

Enclosed are some more scratches of study heads. At home I heard you have had a good year, and had an offer of fr. 1000 per month, which you refused. I can understand that being once at G. & Co. you stay there, it has been one of the first great houses, it might perhaps still be able to outlive many rivals.

I still think however, that every year it will become more difficult to follow the routine, which hitherto is kept up in the art trade, and will it be possible to find now a new method of doing business? Perhaps not.

Hardly ever did I begin a year of gloomier aspect, in a gloomier mood, nor do I expect any future of success, but a future of strife.

It is dreary outside, the fields a mass of lumps of black earth, and some snow, with mostly days of mist and mire in between, the red sun in the evening and in the morning, crows, withered grass, and faded, rotting green, black shrubs, and the branches of the poplars and willows rigid, like wire against the dismal sky. This is what I see in passing, and it is quite in harmony with the interiors, very gloomy, these dark winter days.

It is also in harmony with the physiognomy of the peasants and weavers. I don't hear the latter complain, but they have a hard

time of it. A weaver, who works on steadily, weaves a piece of 60 yards for instance a week. While he weaves a woman must spool for him, that is wind the spindles of thread, so there are two who work and have to live on it.

On that piece of cloth, he makes a net profit, for instance, of fr. 4.50 a week, and when he takes it to the manufacturer, he nowadays often gets the message, that not before one or two weekstime can he take another piece home. So not only wages are low, but work pretty scarce.

In consequence, there is often something agitated and restless about these people.

It is a different spirit from that of the charbonniers, with whom I lived in a year of strikes and many accidents. That was still worse, but yet it is often pathetic here too; the people are quiet, and literally *nowhere* have I heard anything resembling rebellious speeches.

But they look as little cheerful as the cab horses or the sheep transported by steamer to England.

Good-bye, I hope you will be able to send money, I have not quite a guilder left, and must have a model for some hours still to-day, so to-morrow I shall be at a dead-lock, but maybe your letter will come.



Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,

You would greatly oblige me, by trying to get for me:

*Illustration* No. 2174, 24th October 1884.

It is already an old number, but at the office you will probably be able to get it. In it there is a drawing by Paul Renouard, a strike of weavers at Lyons. Also one from a series of Opera sketches (of which he has also published etchings), —called “Le Harpiste,” which I like very much.



Then he has also made, just recently, “Le Monde Judiciaire,” which I got from Rappard, you know it probably, from the “Paris Illustré” by Damas.

But I think the drawing of the weavers the most beautiful of all, there is so much life and depth in it that I think this drawing might hold its own beside Millet, Daumier, Lepage.

When I think how he rose to such a height by working from the very beginning from nature,

without imitating others, and how he is yet in harmony with the very clever people, even in technique, though from the very first he had his own style, I find him again a proof that by truly following nature the work improves every year.

And I am daily more convinced that people, who do not in the first place wrestle with nature, *never* succeed.

I think that if one has tried to follow attentively the great masters, one finds them all back at certain moments, deep in reality,



I mean their so-called *creations*, one will see them in reality, if one has the same eyes, the same sentiment as they have. And I do believe if the critics and connoisseurs were better acquainted with nature their judgment would be more correct than now, when it is the routine only to live in pictures, and to compare them mutually. Which of course, as one side of the question, is good in itself, but lacks a solid basis, if one begins to forget nature, and looks only superficially. Can't you understand, that I am perhaps not wrong in this, and to say still more clearly what I mean, is it not a pity that you, for instance, seldom or hardly ever come in those cottages, or associate with those people, or see that sentiment in landscape, which is painted in the pictures you like best. I do not say that you *can* do this in your position, just because one must look much and long at nature, before one comes to the conviction that, the most touching things the great masters have painted, yet find their origin in life and reality itself. A basis of sound poetry, which exists eternally as a fact, and can be found if one digs and seeks deeply enough.

"Ce qui ne passe pas dans ce qui passe," it exists.

And what Michaelangelo said in a splendid metaphor, I think Millet has said without metaphor, and Millet can perhaps best teach us to see, and get "a faith." If I make better work later on, I certainly shall not work *differently* than now, I mean it will be the same apple, though riper; I shall not change my mind about what I have thought from the beginning. And that is the reason why I say for my part: if I am no good now, I shall be no good later on either, but if later on, then now too. For corn is corn, though people from the city may take it for grass at first, and also the reverse.

In any case, whether people approve or do not approve of what I do, and how I do it, I, for my part, know no other way than to wrestle so long with nature till she tells me her secret.

All the time I am working at various heads and hands.

I have also drawn some again, perhaps you would find something in them, perhaps not, I can't help it. I repeat, I know no other way.

But I can't understand that you say: perhaps later on, we shall admire even the things made now.

If I were you, I should have so much self-confidence and in-

dependent opinion, that I should know whether I could see *now*, what there was in a thing or not.

Well, you must know those things for yourself.

Though the month is not quite past, yet my purse is quite empty. I work on as hard as I can, and I, for my part, think that by constantly studying the model, I shall keep a straight course.

I wish you could send me the money a few days before the first for that same reason, that the end of the months are always hard, because the work brings such heavy expenses, and I don't sell any of it. But this will not go on so for ever, for I work too hard and too much, that I shouldn't bring it at least so far as to defray my expenses without being in a dependent position. For the rest, nature outside and the interiors of the cottages, they are splendid of tone and sentiments just at present, I try hard not to lose time.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

394

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for the "Illustrations" you sent, I am much obliged to you. I think the various drawings by Renouard all beautiful and I did not know one of them.

However, this is not to give you extra trouble, but because I wrote things about them which perhaps cannot quite be applied to other drawings of his, the real composition of Renouard's, which I meant, is not among them, perhaps that number is out of print. The amplitude of the figure in it was superb, it was an old man and some women and a child I believe, who were sitting doing nothing in a weaver's cottage, where the looms stood still.

From the Salon of '84 I had not yet seen *anything* in reproduction and now I got at least some idea of a few interesting pictures from the Salon number. For instance of that composition by Puvis de Chavannes.

I imagine that the Harpignies with the setting sun must have been splendid. And the pictures of Feytaud of which they give sketches.

I was also struck by the figure of a girl by Emile Levy: "Japonaise" and the picture by Beyle: "Brûleuses de Varech," and that by Cottin: "L'Eté," three nude women's figures.

I am very busy painting those heads. I paint in the day-time and draw in the evening. In this way I have painted at least some thirty already and drawn as many.

With this result, that I see a chance of doing it better still ere long I hope.

I think that *for figure in general it will help me*. To-day I had one white and black against the flesh-colour.

And I am also seeking for blue all the time. The peasants' figures are as a rule blue here. That blue in the ripe corn or against the withered leaves of a beech hedge, so that the faded shades of darker and lighter blue are vivified and drawn out by contrast with the golden tones of reddish brown, is very beautiful and has struck me here from the very first. The people here instinctively wear the most beautiful blue that I have ever seen.

It is coarse linen which they weave themselves, warp black, wool blue, the result of which is a black and blue striped pattern. When this fades and becomes somewhat discoloured by wind and weather it is an infinitely quiet, delicate tone, which just brings out the flesh colours.

Well, blue enough to react on all colours, in which hidden orange elements are to be found, and discoloured enough not to jar.

But this is a question of colour and what matters more to me at the point where I am now is the question of form. I think the best way to express form is with an almost monochrome colouring, the tones of which differ principally in intensity and in value. For instance "La Source" by Jules Breton was painted almost in one colour. But one really ought to study each colour separately in connection with its contrast, before one can be positively sure of being harmonious.

When there was snow, I still painted a few studies of our garden. The landscape has changed much since then, now we have splendid evening skies of lilac with gold over dark silhouettes of the cottages between the masses of ruddy-coloured brushwood—above which the spare black poplars rise, while the foregrounds are of a faded and bleached green varied by strips of black earth and dry pale reeds rushes along the ditch-edges.

I certainly see all this too—I think it just as superb as anybody else, but I am still more interested in the proportion of a figure, the division of the oval of the head, and I have no hold on the rest before I have a better grip on the figure.

Well—first comes the figure, I, for my part, cannot understand the rest without it, and it is the figure that gives the sentiment to it. I can understand, however, that there are people like Daubigny and Harpignies and Ruysdael and so many others, who are absolutely and irresistibly carried away by the landscape itself, their work satisfies us fully because they themselves were satisfied with sky and ground and a pool of water and a shrub.

But I think it a mighty clever saying of Israël's when he remarked of a Dupré it is just like "a picture of the figure."

Good-bye and many thanks again for the "Illustrations."

Yours,

Vincent.

395

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the early remittance of the money of this month, which coming soon, in fact helps me more. Thanks also for the splendid woodcut after Lhermitte, one of the few things of his I know, for I have only seen the following: a group of girls in a cornfield, an old woman in a church, a miner or some such type before a bar and "La Moisson," and that's all, and neither of these giving an idea of his real technique as these woodcutters do. If "Le Monde Illustré" gives every month a composition of his—this one forms part of a series "Les Mois Rustiques," I should like very much to have the whole of that series, and I shall be very glad if you send them. For of course, here, I never see anything, and I need, after all, to see some beautiful things now and then; so just deduct fr. 20 some day, but send me such things whenever they appear in the magazines.

As to what you write, that if I had anything ready, which I thought fit, you would try and send it in for the Salon, I appreciate your being willing to do so.

This in the first place, and further, that had I known it six weeks

sooner, I should have tried to send you something for this purpose.

Now I have nothing, however, that I should care to send in, of late I have, as you know, almost exclusively painted heads, and they are studies in the real sense of the word, that is to say: they are meant for the studio.

However, to-day I at once started to make some, which I will send you. Because I think it might be of use, that when you meet a good many people on the occasion of the Salon, you will have something to show—be it only *studies*.

So you will receive an old model, and a young woman's head, and probably more than one of these two models.

As to what you write of your feelings about various conceptions of heads, I believe that these which come straight from a cottage with a moss-grown thatched roof, will not seem absolutely out of place to you, though they are nothing but studies.

Had I known it six weeks before, I would have made of it a spinning woman or a woman winding thread—a whole figure.

Just to come back to that question of the women's heads genre Jacquet, not the earlier ones, but those of the present. Take the reaction against it, which certainly has a motive. Or consider the people who paint heads of girls, such as for instance, our sisters; I can perfectly well understand there are painters who do so. Whistler did it well several times; Millais, Broughton—only to mention people of whom at the time I saw something of the kind; of Fantin Latour I know but little, but what I saw I thought excellent, Chardin-like. And that's saying much.

I, for my part, however, am not the personality to have much chance of getting on a sufficiently intimate footing with girls of that sort, so that they would be willing to pose for me. Especially not with my own sisters.

And perhaps I am prejudiced too against women who wear dresses. And my territory is more those who wear jackets and petticoats. But what you say of it, I think it true—namely, that they *can* very well be painted, and that as a reaction against the Jacquets of now, and van Beers, etc., it has its *raison d'être*. But—Chardin (let us summarize in his name the aim of that reaction, Fantin Latour at least, would approve of this) was a Frenchman, and painted "*Françaises*." And the *Dutch, respect-*



*able* women, in my opinion very, very often lack the charm that French women frequently have.

Consequently, the so-called respectable class of Dutch women is not so very particularly attractive to paint, or to think of. But certain ordinary servant girls, on the contrary, are again very Chardin-like.

Just now I paint not only as long as there is daylight, but even in the evening by the lamp in the cottages, when I can hardly distinguish anything on my palette, so as to catch if possible, something of the curious effects of lamplight in the evening, with, for instance, a large cast-shadow on the wall. It is a fact that for the last few years I certainly have not seen anything as beautiful as those wood-cutters by Lhermitte.

How characteristic and full of sentiment his figures are in that composition. Again, many thanks for it.

Yours,  
Vincent.

396

Dear Theo,

Some of the heads I promised you are finished, but they are not quite dry yet. As I wrote you already, they were painted in a dark cottage, and they are studies in the real sense of the word. Long ago I already began to send you studies of drawings.

That I did not continue doing so was against my intention.

I work hard, and suppose that only one of ten or twenty studies which I make, is worth seeing, those few, either more or less in number, though they may be of *no* value *now*, they may be so later on, perhaps.

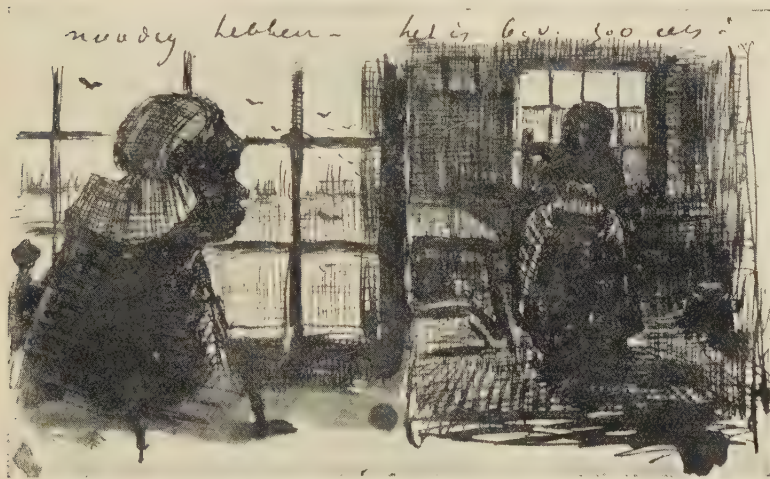
Not so much taken separately, as in connection with other studies.

However it may be—I will try it once more, so as soon as they are quite dry and I can varnish them, I will send you some heads and also a little sketch of a woman winding thread.

And that need not be all—as for more than a full year I have applied myself almost exclusively to *painting*, I dare claim these

to be somewhat different from the first painted studies which I sent.

When, for instance, I lately saw those splendid wood-cutters by Lhermitte, I know very well that I am still far from making such a thing myself. But in my views and way of working, namely, always directly from nature or in the smoke-grimed, squalid cottage, the seeing of his work encourages me. For I see (for instance, from details in heads, in hands) how artists such as Lhermitte must have studied the peasant figure, not only from a fairly great distance, but from very close by, not now, while they create and compose with ease and assurance, but before they did so.



“On croit que j’imagine—ce n’est pas vrai—je me souviens,” said one who could compose with a master hand.

Now as for me, I cannot yet show a single *picture*, hardly a single *drawing* yet. But I *do* make studies, and that’s just why I can very well imagine the possibility of there coming a time when I shall also be able to compose easily. And, moreover, it is hard to say where study ends and picture begins.

I am brooding over a couple of larger elaborate things, and if I should happen to get a clear idea of how to reproduce the effects I have in view, in that case, I should keep the studies in question here still, for then I should certainly need them for it—it is, for



instance, something like this: Namely, figures against the light of a window.

I have studies of heads for it, against the light as well as towards the light, and I have worked several times already at the whole figure; winding thread, sewing, or peeling potatoes. Full face and in profile, it is a difficult effect.

But I think I have learnt a few things by it.

Good-bye, I couldn't put off writing to you again.

Yours,

Vincent.

397<sup>1</sup>

Dear Theo,

(April '85.)

I felt the same as you did, when you wrote that you could not work as usual the first days, with me it was the same.

Indeed, those were days we shall not easily forget. And yet the total impression was not terrible, only solemn. Life is not long for anybody, and the question is only to make something of it.

To-day I painted better again, the first two heads turned out badly, that of to-day is a young girl's almost a child's head. As to colour it is a contrast of bright red with pale green against the flesh colour of the little face, there is already such a head among those you took with you.

I should like to hear whether those rolled-up things arrived

<sup>1</sup> First letter after the sudden death of their father.

safely. If I thought that C. M. was in earnest when he asked for children's heads, I might send him that of to-day, but . . . I can't say I feel much inclination to enter into correspondence with him, unless he asks for something more definite. But the fact of his having been at the studio can do no harm.

I should not mind to begin another still-life of that honesty and dry leaves against blue, because he also said something about it.

Of course I intend to go on working hard, but it is absolutely necessary for me to settle my bill for colours as soon as possible. Every year about this time I have been able to pay off and buy some new painting materials. And this year I have painted so much the last months that I really need them more than ever.

When you were here

I did not want to talk much about it or contradict you much, but when you said that I should change some day and that I should not always stay here, any more than Mauve

had always stayed at Bloemendaal, it may be true, but I for myself see no good in moving, because I have a good studio here, and the scenery is very beautiful.

Don't forget I am positively convinced that a painter of rural life can do no better than take Barbizon for an example.

To dwell and to live in the very midst of what one paints, for in the country nature has every day a new and different aspect.

In short, the two reasons for living in the country are: that one can work more there, and one has less expenses.

Between now and the time you are coming again this summer there are, let us say, some three months.

If I work hard every day, I can have by that time another twenty studies for you, besides twenty more to take with you to Antwerp one day if you like.

But it is absolutely necessary that I pay my colours bill as soon as possible. You know that neither in February nor in March I said a single word to you about it. But they have been no easy months for me, I can tell you.



The weather has become colder here again. As soon as we have a few fine days I will try to make a sketch of the churchyard. The head I painted to-day is, I think, as good as the one you have with the big white cap, which is somewhat like this sketch, and might serve as a pendant to it.

If you mounted these two on gilded Bristol, they would perhaps look well in gold, better than without it.

Good-bye, with a handshake, and still often thinking of your visit,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I am still greatly under the impression of what has just happened—so I have worked on quietly these two Sundays.

Enclosed you will find a scratch of a man's head and of a still-



life with honesty, in the same style as the one you took with you; in the foreground are father's tobacco-pouch and his pipe. If you care to have it, you may of course, and welcome.

Mother is looking well, and the many letters she has to write give her some distraction for the present. But, of course, she feels her loss heavily.

I do not know whether you remember how in January, when the fields were covered with snow, and the sun



rose fiery red out of the mist, I wrote to you that I scarcely ever had begun a new year in a more despondent mood.

It is a fact that there will be much trouble in store for us all. Of course you will understand that it is not for my own pleasure that I shall go and live in the studio. It makes things again more complicated for me, but I am quite sure that it is better for the others if I leave. So I am fully decided. Probably mother will go next year to Leyden. Then I shall be the only one of us who stays in Brabant.

And it does not seem at all improbable but that I shall stay there for the rest of my days. In fact I have no other wish than to live deep, deep in the heart of the country, and to paint rural life. I feel that my work lies there, so I shall keep my hand to the plough, and cut my furrow steadily.

I believe you think differently about it, and that perhaps you would prefer my taking another course, and settling elsewhere. But I sometimes think that you feel more for what can be done in the city, while I, on the contrary, feel more at home in the country.

But I shall have a hard time of it yet before I can make people accept my pictures.

Meanwhile, I am not going to let myself be discouraged.

I remember what I once read of Delacroix, how seventeen pictures of his were refused, "*dix-sept de refusés*," as he told his friends straight out.

I was thinking to-day what damned brave fellows they were, those pioneers. But the battle must be carried on even in the present, and for all the little I may be worth I will carry on my own fight.

And so, Theo, I hope we will continue from both sides what we started anew; while waiting for, or rather, toiling on more important compositions, I send you the studies straightway as they come from the cottages.

Of course, the people will speak of unfinished, or ugly, etc. etc., but—my idea is *to show them by all means*.

I, for my part, have the firm conviction that there are a few people who, having been drawn into the city and kept bound up there, yet retain unfading impressions of the country, and remain all their lives homesick for the fields and the peasants.

Such amateurs sometimes are struck by the sincerity in a picture, and what repulses others does not trouble them.

I myself remember how I used to walk for hours in the city, past the show windows, to get a glimpse of some bit of the country, never mind what.

We are now in the very beginning of showing the work: I feel sure that by and by we shall find some friends for it. Circumstances urge us and gradually we shall be able to show better things. For the moment I am strongly preoccupied by the settling of my colours bill, besides, I need canvas, paint and brushes.

As father's death has caused you many extra expenses I have thought of the following arrangement; in case that you should not be able to give me the extra allowance which I used to receive every spring and summer and which I cannot absolutely do without, don't you think it would be fair if I received for myself a sum of, for instance, 200 guilders as my share in the inheritance, which for the rest I gladly leave to the younger ones, and will be able to do so, if you continue to help me?

In fact I do not consider it as if I left them my share, but that it is you who make it possible for them to get my part.

If I go to live in the studio it is absolutely necessary to have, for instance, a closet made, for I have now not the smallest place to put my things away and some improvements must be made to the light. To have to move now, would be as bad for me as if the house were burnt down; I think, with patience and perseverance, we can keep afloat.

As soon as I am settled in the studio I think I shall take up making water-colours regularly every evening, at home in the living-room that is not possible; till then, I shall continue to work from the model also in the evening. This week I intend to start that composition of those peasants around a dish of potatoes in the evening, or—perhaps I shall make daylight of it, or both, or “neither of the two” you will say. But it may succeed or not I am going to begin the studies for the different figures. Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

I have wondered a little that I did not hear from you yet. You will say that you have been too busy to think of it, and of course I understand this.

It is late in the evening, but I want to tell you once more how heartily I hope that our correspondence will become in the future somewhat more animated than it was of late.

Enclosed you will find two scratches from a few studies I made,



while at the same time I am working again at those peasants around the dish of potatoes. I just come home from this cottage and have been working at it by lamplight, though I began it by daylight this time.

This is how the composition looks.

I painted it on a rather large canvas, and as the sketch is now I think there is some life in it.

But yet I am sure C. M., for instance, would find fault with the drawing, etc. Do you know what is a positive argument against that? That the beautiful effects of light in nature demand a very quick hand in drawing.

Now I know quite well that the great masters, especially in the period of their ripest experience, knew both how to be elaborate in this finishing, and at the same time to keep a thing full of life. But that certainly will be for the present beyond my power. As far as I have got now, however, I see a chance of giving a true impression of what I see.

Not always literally exact, rather never exact, for one sees nature through one's own temperament.

The advice I want to give, you know, is the following: Do not let the time pass by, help me to work as much as ever possible, and from now keep all the studies together.

I do not like to sign any of them yet, for I do not want them to



circulate as pictures, which one would have to buy up again afterwards, when one had got some reputation. But it is a good thing if you show them, for you will see that some day we shall find somebody who wants to do the same thing I propose to you now, viz. to make a collection of studies.

I intend to go out regularly every morning, and to attack the very first thing I see people do, either in the field or at home, which in fact I am doing already now.

You are looking for new ideas for the art trade, the idea of being *good* for the amateurs is not new, but it is one that *never gets old*.

Like that of giving security for a purchase. And I ask you,

is it not better for an amateur to possess from one painter, for instance, twenty quite different sketches at the same price which he in all fairness would have to pay for *one* finished picture, that as a saleable article, had its value on the market? If I were in your place, as you know so many young painters who have not yet got a reputation, I would try to bring *painted studies* on the market, not as pictures, but mounted in some way on gilded Bristol, for instance, or black, or deep red.

I mentioned just now the giving of security.

Not *all* painters make many studies—but many do, and especially the young ones must as much as possible do so, mustn't they? He who possesses the studies of a painter may always be sure (at least it seems so to me) that there is a bond between the painter and himself which cannot so easily be broken for a whim.

There are people, as you know, who support painters in the time when they do not as yet earn, very well!

But how often doesn't it happen that it ends wretchedly miserably for both parties, partly because the protector is dissatisfied about the money, which is or at least seems quite thrown away on the other hand, because the painter feels himself entitled to more confidence, more patience and interest than is given him? But in most cases the misunderstandings arise from carelessness on both sides.

I hope this will not be the case between us.

And I hope that by and by my studies will give you some new courage. Neither you nor I are contemporaries of that race which Gigoux, in that book which you sent me, rightly calls "*Les vaillants*."

But to keep the enthusiasm of those days in the present time, seems to me the right thing after all, for it is often true that fortune favours the bold, and whatever may be true about fortune or "*la joie de vivre*," as it is called, one must work and dare, if one wants really to live.

I repeat, let us paint as much as we can and be productive, *and be ourselves with all our faults and qualities*; I say *us*, because the money from you, which I know costs you trouble enough to procure me, gives you the right, when there is some good in my work, to consider half of it your own creation.

Try to speak to somebody of *Le Chat Noir* and ask them if



they want a sketch of those potato-eaters, if so, of what size, for that is all the same to me. Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

400

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your registered letter of yesterday, and the enclosure. I answer it at once and enclose a scratch, more exactly like my last study than the former one.

I have not been able to finish it as much as I intended. I have been working on it for three days continually, from morning till night, and Saturday night the paint got already in a condition which forbade all further work, until it had become quite dry.

To-day I went to Eindhoven to order a little lithographic stone, as this must become the first of a series of lithographs which I intend to begin again. When you were here I asked you what would be the expenses of reproduction with the process of G. & Co. If I remember well, you said it would be fr. 100. Well, the old-fashioned, almost neglected, common lithographic process is, especially perhaps at Eindhoven, much less expensive however.

I have to pay, for the use of the stone, graining, paper, and printing of fifty copies, only three guilders.

I intend to make a series of subjects from rural life, in short—*les pays sans chez eux*.

To-day I took a splendid walk of some hours, with an acquaintance of mine, of whom I showed you the first water-colour of a figure.

I do not say that, for instance, in Brittany, or at Katwijk, or in the Borinage, nature is not *more* striking still and more dramatic, yes, but after all, the moors and the villages here are very, very beautiful too, and once being there, I find an inexhaustible treasure of subjects from rural life, and the only question is—to fall to, and to work.

I have a great mind to make again water-colours and drawings, and as soon as I shall live in my studio, I shall find time for it in the evening.

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I was exceedingly glad that you sent me those fr. 100. As I told you, it was absolutely necessary that I paid some few things, and that worried me. It was not that people troubled me for it, but because I knew that they needed it. And therefore I wrote, that perhaps I should be obliged to reserve for myself, a small part of the inheritance, when the money affairs were settled.

But this is not necessary now, though I can tell you I am sure this year will be very hard.

But I always think of what Millet said : "*je ne veux point supprimer la souffrance*, car souvent c'est elle qui fait s'exprimer le plus énergiquement les artistes."

I think I shall move about the first of May; though, of course, I am on good terms with mother and the sisters—yet I see and feel it is better so, for in the long run it would hardly be possible to live together. For which I can neither blame them, nor myself personally, but rather the incongruity of ideas between persons who want to keep a certain rank and a peasant-painter who does not think of such things.

When I call myself a peasant-painter, that is a real fact, and it will become more and more clear to you in the future, I feel at home there. And it has not been in vain that I spent so many evenings with the miners, and peat-diggers, and weavers, and peasants, musing by the fire, unless I was too hard at work for musing.

By witnessing peasant life continually, at all hours of the day, I have become so absorbed in it that I hardly ever think of anything else.

You write that the public sentiment, that is to say the indifference towards the work of Millet, as you had the occasion of noticing at that exposition, is not encouraging, neither for the artists, nor for those who have to sell those pictures. I quite agree with you in this, but Millet himself has felt and known this, and when reading Sensier I was struck by his saying at the beginning of his career what I do not remember literally, only the meaning of it, that (this indifference) would be bad enough for me if I wanted fine shoes and the life of a gentleman, but—"puisque j'y vais en sabots, je m'en tirerai." And so it has come true.

What I hope not to forget is that "il s'agit d'y aller en sabots,"

that means to be content with the food, drinks, clothes and board with which the peasants content themselves.

That's what Millet did, and in fact he did *not want any better*, and in so doing he has, in his daily life, given an example to the painters, which, for instance, Israëls and Mauve, who live rather luxuriously, have *not* done, and I repeat, Millet is *Father Millet*, that is to say, in all things a guide and counsellor to the younger painters. The greater part of *those I know*, but I know only few of them, would heartily refuse this ; as for myself I agree with him and believe implicitly what he says. I rather dwell upon that word of Millet, because you write about the question how it is that, *when people from the city* paint peasants, their figures, splendidly painted though they may be, involuntarily remind one of the suburbs of Paris.

I too have had that same impression (though Bastien Lepage's woman who digs potatoes is decidedly an exception in my opinion), but it is not this because the painters *personally* have not entered deeply enough into the spirit of peasant life. On another occasion Millet says : " dans l'art il faut y mettre sa peau." De Groux—that is one of his qualities, painted real peasants. (And the government gave him an order for historical pictures, which he made well, but how much better was he when he could be himself!). It remains always a shame and a pity for the Belgians that de Groux is not yet fully appreciated as he deserves. De Groux is one of the good masters *in the style of Millet*. But though he was not nor is acknowledged by the public at large, and though he remains in the background like Daumier, like Tassaert, yet there are people, for instance, Mellery, who at present paint again *in his style*.

From Mellery I lately saw in a magazine a family of *skippers* in the cabin of their barge—man, woman and children round the table. As to *general* sympathy, years ago, I read something about it in Renan, which I have always remembered, and shall continue to believe, that he who wants to accomplish something really good or useful must neither count on nor want the approval or appreciation of the public in general, but, on the contrary, can only expect that perhaps but a very few hearts will sympathize and take part in it.

If you meet somebody of the *Chat Noir*, you can show them provisionally this little sketch, *but I can make a better one if they like*,

for this is done in a hurry, and only made to give you a better idea of the effect and composition, than the first one.

Good-bye and many thanks, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

You need not tell the people of the *Chat Noir* that I myself intend to make a lithograph of this subject. *That lithograph will not be published however*, but is quite a private affair; for the rest, if they *don't want it*, I don't care much, for I shall certainly make for myself the lithographs I want to have.

401

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find some interesting pages about *colour*, namely the great principles in which Delacroix believed.

Add to this "Les Anciens ne prenaient pas par la ligne, mais par les milieux," that means, to begin with the circle or elliptic bases of the masses, instead of with the contour.

For the latter I found the exact words in the book of Gigoux, but the fact itself had preoccupied me already a long time. I believe the fuller of sentiment a thing one makes is, and the more true to nature, the more it is criticized and the more animosity it raises, but, after all, in the end it gets the better of criticism.

I was very glad to hear Portier's opinion, but the question will be whether he will stick to it. But I know they exist, some of those rare people who have "foi de charbonnier" and are not swayed to and fro by public opinion. I am very glad that he found "personality" in it. In fact I try more and more to be myself, caring relatively little whether people approve or disapprove of it. I don't mean to say that I should not care if Mr. Portier stuck to his good opinion, on the contrary, I will try to make things which strengthen him in it. By the same mail you will receive a few copies of a lithograph. Of the sketch I painted in the cottage, I should like to make, with a few alterations, a definite picture. And that would perhaps be one which Portier could show, or which we could send to an exhibition.

At least it is a subject which I have felt, and such as it is I myself could point out, as well as other critics, its weak points, and some *absolute mistakes*. But there is a certain *life* in it, perhaps more than in some pictures that are absolutely faultless.

I too believe that if Henri Pille had had to decide, the *Chat Noir* would perhaps not have refused it.

After all I don't care much, for in order to be quite independent I want to learn to make lithographs myself.

If I make a picture of the sketch I will make at the same time a new lithograph of it, and so that the figures, which, I am sorry to say are now turned the wrong way, come right again.

Not to make the letter too heavy, for mother is writing too, I finish; I will write soon again; thanks for your letter. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

(Here follow the French pages by Delacroix.)

“ Les anciens n'ont admis que trois couleurs primaires, le jaune, le rouge et le bleu, et les peintres modernes n'en admettent pas d'autres. Ces trois couleurs en effet sont les seules indécomposables et irréductibles. Tout le monde sait que le rayon solaire se décompose en une suite de sept couleurs, que Newton a appelées primitives: le violet, l'indigo, le bleu, le vert, le jaune, l'orangé et le rouge; mais il est clair que le nom de primitives ne saurait convenir à trois de ces couleurs, qui sont composites, puisque l'orangé se fait avec du rouge et du jaune, le vert avec du jaune et du bleu, le violet avec du bleu et du rouge. Quant à l'indigo, il ne saurait compter non plus parmi les couleurs primitives puis qu'il n'est qu'une variété du bleu. Il faut donc reconnaître avec l'antiquité, qu'il y a dans la nature que trois couleurs véritablement élémentaires, lesquelles en se mélangeant deux à deux, engendrent trois autres couleurs composées dites binaires; l'orangé, le vert et le violet.

Ces rudiments développés par des savants modernes ont conduit à la notion de certaines lois, qui forment une lumineuse théorie des couleurs, théorie qu'Eugène Delacroix possédait scientifiquement et à fond, après l'avoir connue par instinct. (Voir Grammaire des Arts du Dessin 3<sup>me</sup> ed. Renouard.) Si l'on combine deux des couleurs primaires, le jaune et le rouge, par exemple, pour



en composer une couleur binaire—l'orangé, cette couleur binaire atteindra son maximum d'éclat dès qu'on la rapprochera de la troisième couleur primaire non employée dans le mélange. De même, si l'on combine le rouge et le bleu pour en produire le violet, cette couleur binaire le violet sera exalté par le voisinage immédiate du rouge. On appelle avec raison complémentaires, chacune des trois couleurs primitives, par rapport : à la couleur binaire qui lui correspond. Ainsi le bleu est complémentaire de l'orangé, le jaune est complémentaire du violet, et le rouge complémentaire du vert. Réciproquement chacune des couleurs composées est complémentaire de la couleur primitive non employée dans le mélange. Cette exaltation réciproque est ce qu'on nomme la loi du contraste simultané.

Si les couleurs complémentaires sont prises à égalité de valeur, c'est à dire au même degré de vivacité et de lumière, leur juxtaposition les élèvera l'une et l'autre à une intensité si violente, que les yeux humaines pourrait à peine en supporter la vue.

Et par un phénomène singulier, ces mêmes couleurs, qui s'exaltent par leur juxtaposition, se détruiront par leur mélange. Ainsi lorsque on mêlé ensemble du bleu et de l'orangé à quantités égales, l'orange n'étant pas plus orangé que le bleu n'est bleu, le mélange détruit les deux tons, et il en résulte un gris absolument incolore.

Mais si l'on mêlé ensemble deux complémentaires à proportions inégales, elles ne se détruiront que partiellement et on aura un ton rompu qui sera une variété du gris. Cela étant, de nouveaux contrastes pourront naître de la juxtaposition de deux complémentaires, dont l'une est pure et l'autre rompue. La lutte étant inégale, une des deux couleurs triomphe, et l'intensité de la dominante n'empêche pas l'accord des deux.

Que si maintenant on rapproche les semblables à l'état pur, mais à divers degrés d'énergie, par exemple, le bleu foncé et le bleu clair, on obtiendra un autre effet dans lequel il y aura contraste par la différence d'intensité, et harmonie par la similitude des couleurs. Enfin si deux semblables sont juxtaposées, l'une à l'état pur, l'autre rompue, par exemple, du bleu pur avec du bleu gris, il en résultera un autre genre de contraste, qui sera tempéré par l'analogie. On voit donc qu'il existe plusieurs moyens différents entre eux, mais également infaillibles, de fortifier, de soutenir, d'atténuer

ou de neutraliser l'effet d'une couleur, et cela en opérant sur ce qui l'avoisine—en touchant ce qui n'est pas elle. Pour exalter et harmoniser ses couleurs, il emploie tout ensemble le contraste des complémentaires et la concordance des analogues, en d'autres termes; la répétition d'un ton vif par le même ton rompu."

402

Dear Theo,

With the same mail you will receive a number of copies of the lithograph. Please give Mr. Portier as many as he wants. And I enclose a letter for him, which I am afraid you will think rather long, and, in consequence, unpractical. But I thought that what I had to say, couldn't be expressed in more concise terms, and that the chief point is to give him arguments for his own instinctive feelings. And in fact, what I write to him, I say it also to you.

*There is a school—I believe—of impressionists. But I know very little about it.* But I do know who are the original and most important masters, around whom, like round an axis—the landscape and peasant painters will turn. Delacroix, Corot, Millet and the rest. That is my own opinion, not correctly formulated

I mean there are (rather than persons) rules or principles or fundamental truths for *drawing*, as well as for *colour*, upon which *one proves to fall back*, when one finds out an actual truth.

In drawing, for instance—that question of drawing figure beginning with the circle—that is to say taking for basis the elliptic planes. A thing which the ancient Greeks knew already, and which will remain till the end of the world. As to colour, those everlasting problems, for instance, that first question Corot addressed to Français, when Français (who had already a reputation) asked Corot (who then had nothing but a negative or rather bad reputation) when he (F.) came to Corot, to get some information: "Qu'est-ce que c'est un ton rompu? Qu'est-ce que c'est un ton neutre?"

Which can better be shown on the palette than expressed in words.

So what I want to tell Portier in this letter, is my decided belief in Eugène Delacroix and the people of that time.

And at the same time, as the picture which I have on hand is different from lamplights by Dou or van Schendel, it is perhaps not superfluous to point out how one of the most beautiful things of the painters of this country has been the painting of *black*, which yet has *light* in it. Well, just read my letter and you will see that it is not unintelligible, and that it treats a subject that just occurred to me while painting.

I hope to have some chance with that picture of the potato-eaters.



I have also on hand a red sunset.

In order to paint rural life one must be master of so many things. But, on the other hand, I don't know anything at which one works with so much calm, in the sense of serenity, however much struggle one may have in material things.

I am rather worried just now about the moving, that's no easy job, on the contrary. But it had to happen some time, if not now, then later, and in the long run it is better to have a place of one's own, that's a fact.

To change the subject. How typical is that saying about the figures of Millet: "*Son paysan semble peint avec la terre qu'il enseme !*" How exact and how true. And how important it

is to know how to mix on the palette those colours which have no name, and yet are the real foundation of everything. Perhaps, I daresay *for sure*, the questions of *colour*, and more exactly broken and neuter colours, will preoccupy you anew. Art dealers speak so vaguely and arbitrarily about it, I think. In fact, so do painters too. Last week I saw at an acquaintance's a decidedly clever, realistic study of an old woman's head, by somebody who is directly, or indirectly, a pupil of the school of the Hague. But in drawing, as well as in colour, there was a certain hesitation, a certain narrow-mindedness, much greater, in my opinion, than one sees in an old Blommers or Mauve or Maris. And this symptom threatens to become more and more general. If one takes realism in the sense of *literal* truth, namely *exact* drawing and local colour. There are other things than that. Well, good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

403

Dear Theo,

I want to tell you that I am working at the potato-eaters, and I have painted new studies of the heads, especially the hands are greatly altered.

What I try most is to bring *life* into it.

I wonder what Portier will say about it when it is finished?

The Lhermites are superb. I am quite enthusiastic about them.

It is full of sentiment, calculated both in general and in detail, but especially broadly conceived and amply treated. I do hope, that you will take note of it when new months of the series are published. Tell me, please, what will be the best way to send a picture of somewhat larger size, and to what address it must be sent.

I will not send the potato-eaters unless *I know for sure* there is *something* in it.

But I am getting on with it, and I think there are quite other things in it than you ever can have seen in my work. At least so distinctly.

I mean especially the life. I paint this *from memory on the picture*

*itself*. But you know yourself how many times I have painted the heads!

And then I run over every night to hit off some details on the spot.

But in the picture I give free scope to my own head in the sense of *thought* or imagination, which is not so much the case in *studies* where no creative process is allowed, but where one finds food for one's imagination in reality, in order to make it exact.

But you know I wrote to Mr. Portier: "jusqu'à présent je n'ai fait que des *études*, mais les *tableaux* vont venir." And I will stick to that.

I intend soon to send again a few studies from nature too.

It is the *second* time that a saying by Delacroix means so much to me. The first time it was his theory about colours, but afterwards I read a conversation he had with other painters, about the making viz. the *creation* of a picture.

He pretended that the best pictures are made from memory. *Par cœur!* he said. And about that conversation, I read, that when all those honest people had gone home in the evening, Delacroix with his usual vivacity and passion loudly *called after them in the centre of the boulevard, Par cœur! par cœur!* probably to the great astonishment of the respectable passers-by. Just like Jaque, who when he had spent the evening with a friend, kept on sending him a message by his boy, after midnight, and all night through: "J'ai encore par la présent l'honneur de vous assurer que votre Mr. Ingres n'est qu'un imagier, et que Daumier le surpasse infiniment," or something like that.

I will not send the picture before I have heard from you, in fact it is not quite finished yet.

But the most difficult things—the heads, the hands, and the ensemble—are finished. Perhaps you will now find in it what you wrote some time ago, that though it is personal, yet it will remind you of other painters—with a certain family likeness. What you did not find in my studies then, but I think, if you compare my studies with other studies, there would also be resemblance.

Once more thanks for the Lhermites and other illustrations, "Le Chat Noir" was less good than I expected, though the title is beautiful. I was glad to find in the "Vie Moderne" some particulars about the life of Jules Dupré. I sometimes think that *perhaps*



Mistigris (le plus malin des paysagistes) from *Balzac's Comédie Humaine*, might have been Dupré in his youth. But I do not know whom Balzac meant by it, and in fact the person plays no principal part in the book. Do you know who also often works in that way of drawing with ellipses, of which Gigoux spoke? Henri Pille. "Ne pas prendre par la ligne, mais par le milieu"—is a famous truth. Meunier, Mellery and Rappard also often draw in that way, and Allebé.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

404

Dear Theo,

(30 April '85.)

On your birthday I send you my best wishes for good health and serenity. I should have liked to send you the picture of the potato-eaters on that day, but though it is getting on well, it is not quite finished yet.

Though the definite picture will have been painted in a relatively short time, and for the greater part from memory, yet it has taken a whole winter of painting study-heads and hands.

And as to those few days in which I have painted it now, it has been a regular battle, but one for which I feel great animation.

Though every moment I was afraid I should never get out of it. But painting is also "agir-créer."

When the weavers weave that cloth, which I think is called cheviot, or also the peculiar Scottish plaids, then you know their aim is, for the cheviot, to get special broken colours and greys, and for the many-coloured checkered cloth, to make the most vivid colours balance each other, so that, instead of the tissue being crude, the *effet produit* of the pattern is harmonious at a distance.

A grey, woven from red, blue, yellow, dirty white and black threads, a blue that is *broken* by a green, and orange-red, or yellow thread, are quite different from *plain colours*, that is to say they are more iridescent, and primary colours become *hard*, cold and *dead* next to them. But for the weaver or rather the designer of the pattern or the combination of colours it is not always easy to fix his

estimation of the number of threads and their direction, as little as it is easy to blend the strokes of the brush into an harmonious whole.

If you could compare the first painted studies I made on my arrival here at Nuenen and the picture now on hand, I think you would see that as to colour some ground has been gained.

I believe that the question of the analysis of colours will pre-occupy you, too, some day, for as connoisseur and expert, I think one must also have a *fixed opinion*, and possess certain *convictions*.

At least for one's own pleasure, and in order *to motivate one's opinion*, and one must also be able to explain it with a few words to others, who sometimes address themselves for information to a person like you, when they wish to know something more about art.

In regard to Portier I have still something to say—of course I am not at all indifferent to his private opinion, and I highly appreciate his saying that he did not retract anything from what he had said.

Neither do I mind that it came out he had not hung those first *studies*. But if I send a picture for him also if he likes, *he can only get it on condition that he will show it*.

As to the potato-eaters, it is a picture that shows well in gold, I am sure of that, but it would show as well on a wall, papered in the deep colour of ripe corn.

Without such a setting *it simply cannot be seen*.

Against a dark background it does not show off well, and not at all against a dull background. That is because it gives a glance in a very grey interior. In reality, it also stands, as it were, in a gold frame, because more towards the spectator there would be the hearth and the glow of the fire on the white walls, which now stand outside the picture, but in reality throw the whole thing back.

I repeat, it must be shut off by framing it in something of deep gold, or brass colour.

If you yourself want to see it as it must be seen, don't forget this, please. This coupling it to a gold tone gives, at the same time, a brightness *to spots where you would not expect it*, and takes away the mottled aspect it gets when unluckily put against a dull or black background. The shadows are painted in blue, and a gold colour stimulates this.

I brought it yesterday to a friend of mine at Eindhoven who has taken up painting. After three days or so, I shall go and wash it there with the white of an egg, and finish some details.

The man, who himself is trying very hard to learn to paint, and to get a good palette, was very much pleased with it. He had already seen the study from which I had made the lithograph, and said he had not thought I could have carried the drawing and colour at the same time to such a pitch. As he also paints from the model, he knows too what there is in a peasant's head or fist, and about the hands, he said he himself had now got quite a different notion of how to paint them.

I have tried to make it clear how those people, eating their potatoes under the lamplight, have dug the earth with those very hands they put in the dish, and so it speaks of *manual labour*, and how they have honestly earned their food.

I have wanted to give the impression of quite a different way of living than that of us civilized people. Therefore I am not at all anxious for everyone to like it or to admire it at once.

All winter long I have had in hand the threads of this tissue, and have searched for the definite pattern, and though it has become a tissue of a rough and coarse aspect, nevertheless the threads have been selected carefully and according to certain rules. And it might prove to be a real *peasant picture*. *I know it is*. But he who prefers to see the peasants in their Sunday-best, may do as he likes. I for my part am convinced I get better results by painting them in their roughness, than by giving them a conventional charm.

I think a peasant girl is more beautiful than a lady, in her dusty and patched blue petticoat and bodice, which get the most delicate hues from weather, wind and sun. But if she puts on a lady's dress she loses her typical charm. A peasant in his fustian clothes in the fields is more typical than when he goes to church on Sunday in a kind of dress coat.

In the same way it would be wrong, I think, to give a peasant picture a certain conventional smoothness. If a peasant picture smells of bacon, smoke, potato-steam, all right, that's not unhealthy, if a stable smells of dung, all right, that belongs to a stable; if the field has an odour of ripe corn or potatoes or of guano or manure, that's healthy, especially for people from the city.

Such pictures may *teach* them something. But to be perfumed is not what a peasant picture needs.

I wonder whether you will find in it something to please you? I hope so. I am glad that just now when Mr. Portier has said he is going to take up my work I, for my part, have something more important than only the studies. As to Durand Ruel, though he did not think the drawings worth while, do show him this picture, he may sneer at it all right, but show it him nevertheless, that he may see there is some energy in our work. But you will hear: "Quelle croûte." You may be sure of that, so am I. Yet we must continue to give something *typical* and *honest*.

To paint peasant-life is a serious thing, and I should reproach myself if I did not try to make pictures which raise serious thoughts in those who think seriously about art and about life.

Millet, de Groux, so many others have given an example of character, and of not minding reproaches, such as nasty, coarse, dirty, stinking, etc., etc., so it would be a shame to doubt.

No, one must paint the peasants as being one of them, as feeling, thinking like they do.

Because one cannot help being as one is.

I often think how the peasants form a world in themselves, in many respects so much better than the civilized world. Not in every respect, for what do they know about art and many other things?

I have still a few smaller studies, but you will understand that the large one has preoccupied me so much, that I have been able to do very little else. As soon as it is quite finished and dry, I will send you the picture in a box, and add a few smaller ones.

I think it will be well not to wait long before sending it, therefore I shall do so, probably the second lithograph will not be ready then, but I understand that, for instance, Mr. Portier must be somewhat strengthened in his opinion, so that we can firmly count upon him as a friend. I heartily hope this will succeed. I have been so absorbed in the picture that I literally almost forget my moving which has to be looked to after all.

My cares will not become less, but the lives of all painters of that kind are so full of them that I should not wish to have an easier time of it than they had. And seeing that, in spite of all, they got their pictures made, material difficulties will worry me,

it is true, but they shall not crush me or make me slacken, in short.

I think the potato-eaters will get finished after all; the last days are almost dangerous for a picture, as you know, because when it is not quite dry, one cannot work in it with a large brush without the great chance of spoiling it. And the alterations must be made quietly and calmly with a small brush. Therefore I have simply taken it to my friend and told him to take care that I should not spoil it in that way and that I should come to his house to give those finishing touches. You will see, it has originality.

Good-bye, I am sorry it was not ready by to-day, once more I wish you health and serenity. Believe me, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

To-day I am still working at some smaller studies, which then can be sent at the same time.

Did you send that copy of the Salon?

405

Dear Theo,

This afternoon I received your letter and will answer it at once. I am anxious to get some idea about the Salon, especially about the picture by Roll.

I do not wonder that, for instance, Durand Ruel has not yet taken any notice of the drawings.

And I had even rather that Portier did not exaggerate in admiring them, at least I feel I can do better, just because I am changing now again, so much so, that I think my former work but hesitatingly done.

I think you will see what I mean in the picture of the potato-eaters, I think Portier will understand. It is very dark, however, and in the white, for instance, hardly any white has been used, but simply the neutral colour, which is made by mixing red, blue, yellow, for instance, vermillion, Paris blue and yellow of Naples.

That colour in itself is therefore a pretty dark grey, but in the picture it seems white.



I will tell you why I do so. Here the subject is a grey interior, lit up by a little lamp.

The dirty linen table-cloth, the smoky wall, the dirty caps in which the women have worked in the field, all this *when seen through the eyelashes* in the light of the lamp, proves to be *very dark* grey, and the lamp, though a yellow reddish blaze, is lighter still—even much so, than the white in question.

As to the flesh-colours—I know quite well that considered superficially, viz. without thinking about it, they seem *what is called* flesh-colour.

But at first in the picture I have tried to paint them so, with yellow ochre, red ochre and white, for instance.

But that was ever so much *too light* and was decidedly wrong.

What was to be done! All the heads were finished, and even finished with great care, but I repainted them straightway, unmercifully, and the colour in which they are painted now is like *the colour of a good dusty potato unpeeled, of course.*

While doing so, I thought how perfectly exact is that saying about the peasants of Millet: “Ses paysans semblent peints avec la terre qu’ils ensemencent.”

A saying of which I am constantly, involuntarily reminded, when I see them at work, outdoors as well as in indoors.

And I am quite sure that if one asked Millet, Daubigny or Corot to paint a snow landscape without using white, they would do so *and the snow would look white in the picture.*

What you say about the lithograph, that the effect is woolly, I find so too, and in so far it is not my own fault, because the lithographer pretended that, as I had scarcely left any white on the stone, it would not print well. On his suggestion, I had the light spots bitten, if I had simply printed it as the drawing was, the general effect would have been darker, but not crude, and there would have been atmosphere between the planes. But what must I do with the picture? It is of the same size as that spinning woman of last year.

Now I took it again to the cottage, to give it some last touches from nature. But I think I shall get it finished, always spoken comparatively, for in reality I shall never think my own work ready or finished.

I can make it in smaller size, however, or make a drawing of it,

if you prefer so, for I have the thing so well by heart that I could literally almost paint it in my dreams.

Can you see how splendid the thing was I scratch down here?

When I went to the cottage to-night I found the people at supper in the light of the small window instead of under the lamp, oh, it was splendid! The colour too was extraordinary; you remember those heads painted against the window, half the effect was in that way, but darker still.

So the two women and the interior had exactly the colour of dark soft soap. But the figure of the man to the left was just lit



up by a light streaming through a door farther on. So the head and hands became the colour of a ten-centimes piece, viz. dull brass. And the blouse where touched by the light, became of the most tender faded blue.

In your next letter tell me, please, what you wish me to do with the picture. Of course we must see that Portier gets something new. But I can just as well copy it in half-size for him, and send this large one to Antwerp, for instance.

As to the luminous pictures of the present, I have seen so little of them these last years.

But about the question itself I have thought a great deal. Corot,

Millet, Daubigny, Israëls, Dupré and others *also paint luminous pictures*, that is to say, one can see through every corner and depth, though the gamut be ever so deep.

But those painters mentioned above paint none of them literally the local tone, they follow the gamut in which they started, express their own ideas in colour, and tone, and drawing. And that their light generally is a rather dark grey in itself which in the picture seems light by contrast, is a truth which you daily have the opportunity of observing.

Well, good-bye. Understand me well, I do not say that Millet does not use white, when he paints snow, but I mean that he and the other tonists could do so if they wanted to, in the same way as Delacroix tells of Paul Veronèse that he painted pale, fair, nude women, with a colour, which, taken apart, looked like street dirt.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I think you will see from the picture that I have my own way of looking at things, but that there is some conformity with others, for instance, certain Belgians. What a shame they refused Josephson's picture. But why do not the rejected painters join to do something for themselves? Union is strength.

406

Dear Theo,

I just prepare a little note for you, to go with the picture in the box, I send it carriage-paid (to Antwerp, or quite through if possible) to your address Rue de Laval.

If you have still to pay for it, it is because perhaps they only prepay till Antwerp. But I did not want you to have expenses for it, as it will perhaps disappoint you.

If this might be the case, take your time to look at it.

Of course, I can't tell what Portier will say.

In the way of criticism I myself could point out things which probably will escape most of the critics.

487

But the reason why I send it with a certain confidence is that, in contrast to many other pictures, there is rusticity, and a certain animation in it. And so, though painted in a different style, in another century than the old Dutch masters, Ostade, for instance, yet it comes also from the heart of the peasant's life, and is original.

When I see, for instance, in the Salon number so many pictures, which as to technique are faultlessly drawn and painted if you like, then many of them yet bore me terribly, because they give me neither food for the heart nor the mind, because they are apparently made without a certain passion. And there is some passion in what I send you.

I have loved to make it, and I have worked at it with a certain animation.

It has not bored me, perhaps for that reason it will not bore others. Because I believe this, I send it you.

Be sure however that I greatly admire in the Salon number things like *L'Alouette* by Jules Breton, Roll's picture, also the Fantin Latour, also *Les Côtes de Cornouailles*, Vernier and some others. I think they are *splendid*, though of many other enormous canvases, I can honestly say, they bore me terribly.

That little woman with the spade by Lhermitte, how typical it is, how full of life, as if made *by a peasant who could paint*, it is a masterpiece.

If I were you I should buy copies of the Lhermittes, to keep them ten years. For they are masterpieces one gets in this way for one's 50 centimes. How is it possible that the magazines are not better?

Lançon is dead as I heard. I have followed his work for years and never has anything of his bored me.

There is life in every pencil stroke.

If such a one dies—of that same race as the Regamey's and Renoir, it is a loss and leaves an empty place.

The drawings by Lançon were admirable, so manly and so broad.

I hear Tissot has an exhibition, did you see it?

It all depends how much life and passion an artist knows to express in his figure, if there is life in it, then a lady's figure by Alfred Stevens, for instance, or some Tissots are indeed just as beautiful.

And the peasants by Lhermitte, Millet, are so beautiful just because of the life there is in them.

In whatever direction one may work, be it Israëls, Herkomer, so many different styles—if there is life and sentiment in it, then it is good.

I suppose there are still many beautiful pictures among those that have *not* been reproduced.

But when I remember a Salon of '70 or '74, for instance, I think there was a higher standard, and since then it has lowered.

If one looks through the Albums Boetzel, for instance. And the best masters are not even reproduced there, for instance, Millet is not. I don't mean at all to pretend that I know it myself exactly.

On the contrary, you see so many Daubigny's, Corot's, Millet's, Dupré's, Israëls', Herkomer's, Breton's, etc., and I none at all. But every day I think about it and feel that the gamut of all those painters is lower than it *seems*, and that even those pictures which seem luminous, if one notices well and compares, are in lower gamut than even the greys of Mauve. Except perhaps the *very best* Mauves—for instance, that old one in the Collection Post with that Caravan of old nags. And his picture of the Salon of two years ago, the launching of that smack.

I hear or see so little, hardly anything at all, so I have not the opportunity to test that question on the pictures themselves. But working, and seeking, and living with nature, as I told you previously, that question leaves me no rest. And there is nothing that expresses so well what I mean, there is nothing that gives me so much ground for my opinion than that saying which expresses so perfectly Millet's colour and technique: "Son paysan semble peint avec la terre même qu'il ensemence."

Mauve,—when he paints brightly—and the other *luminous* Dutch painters of good quality, do not use other colours than the present French painters, or those of the old Dutch school, viz. very simple palettes, but here in Holland they use more white than Millet, or Dupré, or Daubigny or Corot. If some pictures you might see should bring you to write about it some time, I should be very glad.

I just read in the *Graphic*, an article about an exhibition of twenty-five drawings by Fred Walker. Walker died some ten



years ago, you know. Pinwell too—while I write about this subject, I think of their work too, and how very clever they were. How they have done in England exactly the same that Maris, Israël, Mauve have done in Holland, viz. restored nature instead of convention; sentiment and impression instead of academical platitudes and dullness. How they were the first tonists.

But I remember peasants in the field, by Pinwell, “The Harbour of Refuge” by Walker, of which one might also say: *peints avec de la terre*. I ought to see more pictures in order to be able to draw conclusions, and I only ask you, do you know anything about it? *Wine*, of course, contains particles of water, and there will always be water in it; but too much water—and it becomes weak. I do not pretend to say that one can, or must, paint light without white, no more than I should ever pretend wine must be dry. But I do say that one must take care in our clear and bright days, not to pour too much water in the wine, not to mix too much white in the wine of the colour, that there may remain some passion, and that the effects do not become too tame and weaken the whole thing.

Do you know where one could learn something in this respect?

From a picture by Leys, not from the first period, but from the second and third period of Leys.

I remember *The Skaters* and *The Walk on the Ramparts*.

In both pictures there are figures in the snow, and both pictures are not grey, are as light as the Dutch painters of the present would paint snow. That little picture by Millet, which you named me once as the type of an impressionist picture, is that in the Luxembourg?

I believe that many a Dutch landscape would become white, and yet coloured, compared to that tone. Of one thing I am sure, that it is for the greater part painted with red, blue, and yellow, with perhaps a little, but probably not much, white.

I have not seen it for ten or twelve years, but the more I think of it, while seeking myself for certain effects in nature, the less I am inclined to believe that the best French painters use as much white as one seems to use nowadays.

I know something depends on the models too. When I think of the Scheveningen girl that regularly sits for Artz, and who I

remember quite well, she is as fair and as clean as some wh——s. That also is beautiful to paint, yes.

But peasants or fishermen in small villages and far from the city—they are different wherever it may be. *They remind one of the earth*, sometimes they seem modelled in it.

In the poems by Jules Breton, I remember the lines and I believe it is just in that, which he has dedicated to Millet<sup>1</sup> (a peasant going home through the potato fields in the evening).

“ Par le crépuscule et le hâle  
Le paysan deux fois bruni.”

But don't suppose for that reason that I do not like bright pictures—to be sure I do; I know a Bastien Lepage—a bride in the centre who is painted quite *blanc sur blanc* with a little brown face, splendid, and so many Dutch pictures with snow, mist and sky, splendid.

I only want to point out, one may do as one likes, for instance, Jaap Maris, who is sometimes very luminous—next day he paints a view of the city by night in the darkest gamut. What I want to say especially is that pictures like some old Cabats, for instance, certain Dupré's, though perhaps only painted with red, blue and yellow, without much white, yet *in my opinion* are not at all inferior to later, more grey conceptions.

Yesterday I wrote thus far. I just received your letter with the enclosure, for which hearty thanks.

What you write about the Salon is very interesting.

From what you say about the picture by Besnard, I see that you have understood what I wrote about broken colours, orange broken by blue and the reverse.

However, there are many other gamuts too, but that of orange against blue is logical, so is yellow against violet, so is red against green.

The box for the picture is ready, so I send it stretched. It is a light box, but it must dry another day or two. I send at the same time ten other painted studies.

Please tell me some more about the picture by Uhde, you know Rembrandt painted the same subject in his large picture at the National Gallery.

<sup>1</sup> “ Le Retour des Champs ” from the Volume “ Les Champs et la Mer.”

I am in all the mess of moving. Once more, thanks for what you sent. With a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

407

Dear Theo,

Yesterday I sent you by post a number of painted studies and to-day Wednesday, a box, marked VI, carriage-paid, containing the picture.

Please acknowledge receipt, and tell me at the same time if the charge was sufficiently prepaid.

If not, I should like to know it for later parcels. If it was right it costs me not quite two guilders, which I think cheaper than when the carriage is paid at Paris, and we can try it again, some other time, also with rather large dimensions.

I do not know what you will think of the picture, but for this, and for later pictures, be careful not to order frames at once.

For the present we can use our money better for the making of new pictures. And let us only begin to frame them when we have made a small collection. At least that is what I should like best. With the many studies I make, the expenses are indeed heavier than I can manage at present, I just had to pay 25 gld. for rent, too.

But I do think the picture demands to be seen against a colour of gold or brass. Because then the mottled aspect disappears, and the lights get relief. But that effect can easily be obtained by putting a bit of ochre-coloured paper behind it.

It was not yet absolutely dry when I packed it, but I thought it could hardly be damaged.

I should have liked to work on it still longer, but because of the tarnish and as I had varnished it already more than once, I felt I had to give it up.

And I start at once a new thing.

My moving is over now. They are at home not what you imagine, and what they say is "that I followed my own head."

Well, never mind, I'd rather not speak about it.

I must set to work, so good-bye for to-day.

I have had two other stretchers made of the same size as this canvas, I think if we have, for instance, three or four pictures of a certain size, then it will be worth while to have a frame made in that size.

But for a single one there is too much risk, and it is better to *paint much*.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

408

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the enclosed 50 frs. which were especially welcome this month because of the moving. I think that in the long run I shall gain a lot of time by living in the studio as I can set to work, for instance, at once after getting up, while at home it was so that I could not do anything.

These last days I have been working hard on drawings.

They are busy pulling down the old tower in the fields. So there was now an auction of timber and slates and old iron, among others the cross.

I have finished a water-colour of it, in the style of that timber auction, but better I think ; I had also another large water-colour of the churchyard, but till now it did not turn out well.

Yet I have it well in my head, what I want to express—and perhaps I shall get on the third sheet of paper what I mean. And if not, then not. I have just sponged out the two failures, but I am going to try again.

If you like you can have that of the caution.

Then I have on hand a large study of a cottage by night. And about six heads. All this was the reason of my not yet answering your letter.

I work as hard as I can, because I think of going with that friend of mine from Eindhoven to the Antwerp exhibition, if I can manage it. And then I should like to take some work with me to show it there if possible.

I long to hear if Portier has seen the potato-eaters. What you say of the figures is true, that as figure studies they are not what

the heads are. That's why I have thought of trying it in quite a different way, for instance, beginning from the torso instead of the head.

But then it would have become quite a different thing. About their sitting however don't forget those people do not sit on chairs like those in Café Duval, for instance.

The finest thing I saw, was when the woman was simply lying on her knees, that is in the first sketch I sent you.

Well, it is now painted as it is, and we will try it again some day and then certainly not in the same way.

I am very busy too these days, drawing figures.

Thanks also for the copy of "Le Temps" you sent, with the article about the Salon by Paul Mantz.

It is long since I have read so good an article.

I think it very good—the beginning—the picture of those Laplanders, who after the long winter's night see from their dark cottage the sun rise—how in art they are also waiting for light.

Then immediately after, his pointing to Millet, who decidedly has given new light—"et qui restera."

Then his pointing out Lhermitte, as successor of Millet. I think it all manly language, and perfectly correct, and broadly observed.

But I think it a pity that he calls Roll a "commençant," for that is slighting him, and Roll has already made such beautiful things and is "hors ligne."

At least his "Grève de Mineurs" is already "hors ligne." When Paul Mantz says that the labourers of Roll do not work hard, and that it is "un Rêve" well—it is prettily said, and there is some truth in it. But, after all, Roll is right, because it is Paris, and not the sober work of the field.

A workman in the city is after all exactly as Roll paints him.

Rappard has a picture at Antwerp, which I think must be very fine, at least the sketch, which hardly anybody approved of, was very good, in my opinion. I think him very clever.

Have you finished already Zola's *Germinal*? I should love to read it, and shall send it back within a fortnight. Has the May number of *Lhermitte* already appeared?

In the article of Mantz, I also think very good and logical what he says about colour, in a very few words, when he speaks of: "des bleus cendrés que nous aimons," and "les herbes de la prairie



sont très vertes, le taureau est brun roux, la jeune fille est rose, voilà l'accord de 3 tons—" when he speaks about that same question in respect to Lhermitte.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I can imagine Besnard must be interesting.

I don't know whether you noticed that there is a very short remark about "enthusiasm" in the articles by Mantz, and how there is also something about "le grain de folie qui est le meilleur de l'art."

I know you wrote "perhaps he is more enthusiast than merchant, which is better perhaps."

On your part that is said mildly enough.

I myself, however, think that enthusiasm is not at all incompatible with being a dealer.

And I simply remind you of Mouret and Bourdoncle. Mantz also just mentions and quite hits the mark about "cette maladie qu'on appelle sagesse."

What shall I say—the future and experience will repeat it some day—that for which I cannot find the right words. I mean that enthusiasm sometimes calculates better than even the cool heads who reckon themselves "above such things." And instinct, inspiration, impulse, conscience, are better guides than many people think. And however that may be, I, for one, agree with the saying: "mieux vaut crever de passion, que crever d'ennui."

The old tower will be pulled down next week! The spire has gone already. I am working at a picture of it. In these new drawings I begin the figures from the torso, and it seems to me that, in this way, they become fuller and broader. If fifty are not enough, I shall draw a hundred, and if that is not yet enough, still more, till I have thoroughly what I want, namely that everything is round, and that there is, so to say, neither beginning nor end to the figure anywhere, but that it makes one harmonious lifelike whole.

You know that this was exactly the question, mentioned in the book of Gigoux, "ne pas prendre par la ligne, mais par le milieu."

Mantz says: "le modelé est la probité de l'art." And what he alters in the words of Ingres is, that Ingres said: "le dessin est la probité de l'art" and added "je voudrais marquer le contour d'un fil de fer." Hébert had what he called "l'horreur de la ligne."

And then again there are people who pretend that all dogmas are practically absurd. It is a pity that this is again a dogma in itself.

The only thing to do is to follow one's own way, to try one's best, to make the thing live.

If they had not made Thys Maris too wretched, and too melancholy to work, perhaps he would have found something wonderful.

I think so often of that fellow, Theo, how marvellous is his work.

It is a dream—but what an artist he is!

By God, if that fellow were now as he was when he began, what a centre he would become.

For the Dutch school of the present needs some new blood.

One must not work in "thousand fears," and yet, that is what many do, who are so anxious to get hold of the right colours and tones that by that very anxiety, they become like tepid water. But the real artists, Israëls or Maris, or Mauve or Neuhuys act quite differently, for they say "Just dash the colour on."

Well—because they have suppressed all enthusiasm, they will "faire hurler jusqu'aux chînes de désespoir," when nobody has any more enthusiasm, and nobody has any more daring left. We have not come as far as that, I know, but what I say is this, let enthusiasm remain, otherwise we reach that summit of wisdom, called *the time of the periwigs*. One has only to read the history of the old schools of painting to see that it often ends so. How serious and bitter was that fourth article of Mantz—the last one, and how exactly what is wanted.

Please take note of the Lhermites when they appear. How beautiful they are. I just met Aunt C. who assured me that you would certainly still come this summer. About that time I will have finished quite some figures, like those I started now.

Good-bye.

I add another little word—I cannot advise you strongly enough, to study for yourself those different theories of Eugène Delacroix about colour.

Though—not up-to-date—though outside the world of art

so long—put outside because of my wooden shoes, etc., yet I see, for instance, from that article by Mantz, that there are even now still connoisseurs and amateurs—who *know* something, and that the very thing Thoré, Théophile Gautier knew.

And that leaving the so-called civilized world of progress for what it is, namely a *delusion*, the most important thing remains, what already in '48 the reformers in the matter of taste have proclaimed in a manly and vigorous way. Like here in Holland, Israël's will not be surpassed, but, in my opinion, will remain the master.

And in Belgium, Leys and de Groux.

Please don't make the mistake of imagining that I want to insist upon imitation, for that is not at all what I mean.

You have seen much more than I have, and I wish I had seen what you have seen, and still daily set eye on. But perhaps the very fact of seeing so much, makes it difficult to reflect in short.

I only want to say that it is with you, as with so many others, later in life you must repeat and study again the principles of art.

I mean that in your quality of expert, you, just as well as the painters themselves, *in theory even better than they*, because you must give advice, and speak about pictures in the making, must know certain rules about colours and perspective. Excuse me, but it is true what I say, that this will perhaps be of more practical use to you than you perhaps suppose, and would raise you above the common mark of the art dealers, which is necessary, for the common mark is below the mark.

I know pretty well from my own experience, what art dealers know and what they do not.

I believe they often are taken in, and do business for which they are sorry afterwards, just because they know too little of how a picture is made. Well, but I know that you take pains already, for instance, by reading good books like that of Gigoux.

Study well that question of the colours, etc. I also try to do so, and I will gladly and thankfully read also what you may find of that kind. At present I am busy putting in practice, on the drawing of a hand and arm, what Delacroix said about drawing: "Ne pas prendre par la ligne mais par le milieu." That gives opportunity enough to proceed from ellipses. And what I try to acquire, is not to draw *a hand*, but the gesture, not mathematically correctly

a head, but the *expression* at large. For instance, when a digger looks up and sniffs the wind or speaks. In short, *life*.

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Dear Theo,

I just received *Germinal*, and started to read it at once. I have read about fifty pages, which I think splendid; I once travelled on foot those same parts.

Enclosed a sketch of a head, which I brought home just now.



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There was the same among the last studies I sent you, namely the largest of all. But painted smoothly.

Now I have not smoothed down the stroke of the brush, and the colour is quite different too, in fact.

I have not yet made a head, which is so much "peint avec de la terre" and more will follow now.

If all goes well—if I shall earn a little more—so that I can travel more—then I hope to go and paint the miners' heads some day.

But I shall work on, till I am absolutely master of my hand, so that I can work quicker still than now, and, for instance, in a month, bring home about thirty studies. I do not know if we shall earn money, but if it is only enough to let me work terribly hard, then I am satisfied; the question is, to do what one wants to do.

Yes, we must make the miners some day.

What did Portier say about the potato-eaters? I know quite well it has its faults, but just because I see that the heads I make now, become more vigorous I dare maintain that in connection with later pictures, the potato-eaters will keep its value, too.

Last year I often got desperate about the colour, but now I work with more confidence. You must tell me what you think best, to keep my last work for Antwerp, or to send it as soon as possible to you and Portier. It is all the same to me, I have now finished seven heads and one water-colour, so I could send again a small batch. Good-bye, once more thanks for *Germinal*, I am still reading it while I write. It is splendid.

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(June.)

Thanks for your early remittance of this month. I am very pleased to hear what you write about the picture, the remarks Portier and Serret made, and that they found good things in it. I myself criticize it too, and perhaps more seriously than they do, especially about the torsos—so I do not want them to approve of it entirely. When you see them some day, just tell them that it is quite possible I shall change from the copper and soft soap-





an expression as of a lowing cow, a person from:—"la campagne était grosse d'une race d'hommes qui poussaient, une armée noire, qui germait lentement dans les sillons, grandissant pour la récolte des siècles futurs et dont la germination allait bientôt faire éclater la terre."

But that last expression is, I think, better in the study which I have signed, and which I made *before* I read it, *so without thinking about Germinal*, simply a peasant woman coming home from setting potatoes, all covered with dust from the field.

I think I shall make a repetition of that picture<sup>7</sup> of the cottage. The subject is so striking, those two half-mouldered cottages under one and the same thatched roof reminded me of an old couple, worn with age, that have grown into one and are seen supporting each other.

For you see, there are two cottages and a double chimney. That's in fact what one frequently sees here.

I can't spare the time, otherwise I should have much to say about *Germinal*, which I think splendid. Just one passage though: "du pain! du pain! du pain! imbéciles, répéta M Hennebeau, est-ce que je suis heureux? Une colère le soulevait contre ces gens qui ne comprenaient pas. Il leur en aurait fait cadeau volontiers, de ses gros appointements pour avoir, comme eux, le cuir dur, l'accouplement facile et sans regret. Que ne pouvait-il les asseoir à son table, les empâter de son faisan, tandis qu'il irait forniquer derrière les haies, culbuter les filles en se moquant de ceux qui les avaient culbutés avant lui. Il aurait tout donné, son éducation, son bien-être, son luxe, sa puissance de directeur, s'il avait pu être, une journée, le dernier des misérables qui lui obéissaient, libre de sa chair, assez gougat pour giffler sa femme et prendre du plaisir sur les voisines. Et il souhaitait aussi de crever de faim, d'aimer le ventre vide, l'estomac tordu de crampes, ébranlant le cerveau d'un vertige, peut-être aurait-il tué l'éternelle douleur. Ah! vivre en brute, ne rien posséder à soi, battre les blés avec la hercheuse la plus laide, la plus sale, et être capable de s'en contenter.—Imbéciles ces songes—creux de révolutionnaires, ils élargiraient même le malheur de la terre, ils feraient un jour hurler jusqu'aux chiens de désespoir, lorsqu'ils les auraient sortis de la tranquille *satisfaction* des instincts, pour les hausser à la souffrance *inassouvie* des passions."

As to what you write about Portier "he is perhaps more

enthusiast than merchant” and your doubting whether he can do anything with my work, I think that neither you, nor I, nor he can decide that for the moment.

But when you see him, tell him frankly, my idea is that when after the sympathy he professed as to my work, I try my utmost to send him work and thus remain consistent, I firmly count on his persevering in showing my work.

Tell him my idea is that part of the public in Paris will not always remain the dupe of convention, however attractive it may be, but, on the contrary, things which keep the dust from the cottages or from the field, will find there some very faithful friends, though I cannot say why or how.

So that he must not be easily discouraged, for that neither you nor I would blame him if he did not succeed at once, but that he must go on showing it and I shall go on sending.

If he will write to me his observations, I think they may be of use to me, and he must not hold them back. I must tell you that I sometimes long very much to see again the Louvre and Luxembourg, and that sooner or later, I shall have to study the technique and colour of Millet, Delacroix, Corot and others. But it is not directly urgent, I think the more I work, of the greater use it will be to me, *when* it will happen some day.

But it is a fact one needs both nature *and* pictures.

It is especially that question of the gamut in which they are painted, and the breaking and opposition of the colours, which daily preoccupies me.

Has Lhermitte’s “Month of May” appeared already?

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

To-day I dispatched the small box in question, containing, except what I mentioned already, another picture *Cimetière de Paysans*.

I have omitted some details—I wanted to express how those ruins show that *for ages* the peasants have been laid to rest in the

very fields which they dug up when alive—I wanted to say what a simple thing death and burial is, just as simple as the falling of an autumn leaf—just a bit of earth dug up—a wooden cross. The fields around—they form there, where the grass of the churchyard ends, beyond the little wall, a last line against the horizon—like the horizon of the sea.

And now those ruins tell me how a faith and a religion mouldered away—strongly founded though they were, but how the life and death of the peasants remain for ever the same, budding and fading regularly, like the grass and the flowers growing there in that churchyard ground.

“Les religions passent, Dieu demeure,” is a saying of Victor Hugo’s, whom they have also recently brought to rest.

I do not know if either of these two pictures will please you—the cottage with the mossed roof reminded me of a wren’s nest. Well, you must just look at them.

I must use this opportunity to explain once more, as I found new and clear words for it, why I wrote to you and write again, that I am far from sure that your present opinion is a definite conviction.

The house of Goupil & Co. is no good training school to become acquainted with pictures, still less with painters.

I tell you my opinion is, that one does not even learn to have an independent view. To whom did they pay great honour? To Paul Delaroche.

I need not tell you that Delaroche was one of those of whom very little remains; there is hardly anybody left now who takes his part.

Another who will not *stay*, though he is *better* and once or twice made something very beautiful, of whom also little will remain—that is Gérôme.

But his Prisoner, his Syrian Shepherds are *real* and I admire them just as much as anybody, and willingly and readily. But for the greater part he is a second Delaroche, both are of equal value, considered in the frame of their time. Now what I pretend is, and I think it most probable, the whole situation will bore you more and more every year. I further pretend, that it is doing a bad turn to others, and especially to oneself, to let oneself be bored. In spite of many wise maxims, I have never been able to believe,

that it may be of any practical use, and for one's own good, to be bored. A good many people have reformed themselves at the age of 30, and have changed considerably. Think this over in all calmness, I tell you, that of all I have learned and heard at Goupil & Co's about art, nothing has kept true. If one reverses the commonplaces, which count there as the highest wisdom in matters of art, namely applauding the former and present Delaroche style, and depreciating the independent modern painters, I repeat, if one *reverses* certain sayings—one breathes in purer air. In short, lad, in conditions and business such curious changes are not only possible, but even usual.

It is odd that after all I doubt whether you will stay in business.

You need not pay attention to this or answer it, I just tell it you straightway to express my idea, not to open sterile discussions.

But it exists—that enchanted land—where one is not free.

Well, I hope to hear soon that you have received the box, and whether you like the pictures.

To-morrow I am going to paint a spot in another village, also a cottage—in smaller size. I found it last Sunday, on a long expedition made in company of a peasant boy, in order to find a wren's nest.

We found six of them, it was a spot which Bodmer certainly would have loved. And they were all nests from which the young birds had flown out, so one could take them without too much scruple. It was so typical, I have still more beautiful nests. Good-bye, write soon, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Before you show it to Portier or Serret I should like you to varnish both pictures.

The village churchyard especially is greatly tarnished, because at first I had painted it quite differently, and then had scraped it off entirely. At first it was a total failure—then without hesitation I began anew, taking it from another side, and painting early in the morning instead of in the evening. And the other one—that of the cottage—was originally a shepherd. Last week the sheep were shorn, I have seen it on a table in the barn. I am glad I can show Portier this time something quite different.



For the rest I am very busy making drawings, in order to send ere long some full-size figures.

But while I was working at those cottages—perhaps you will call them imitations of Michel, though they are not—and looking out for subjects, I found such splendid huts that I cannot help painting some more variations of those “peasant’s nests,” which remind me so much of the wren’s nest.

Oh, it is beyond all doubt—he, who in the present paints the peasants and has his heart in this work, will have on his side part of the public, and not the worst part—though it may not be the largest. But for all that, the end or second part of the month, will prove very meagre for me.

But for the peasant boys it is just the same—and yet they enjoy their lives. I wish you had been with me last Sunday, when we took that long walk. I came home quite covered with mud, for we had had to splash through a brook for half an hour. But painting becomes animating and exciting to me, like hunting—in fact it *is* a hunt for models and beautiful spots. Once more good-bye, and best wishes. It is already late, and at five o’clock I must be on duty, so good-bye.

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Dear Theo,

(June.)

I think you will have received the box by now.

I must tell you that I have another like subject, a white clay cottage, the size more in the breadth.

Yesterday I witnessed a large forest fire, on a blazing hot afternoon. It was a wood in the centre of a bare stretch of moor, and it was a peculiar sight those enormous masses of black and white smoke that went straight up into the air. The fire restricted itself to the heath, the fir-needles and dry twigs. The stems remained standing.

I am very busy drawing figures, but I shall have to make a hundred of them, before I shall paint them, as this will save me time and money.

I think they are getting rounder and fuller than at first.

But I am absolutely without money, and hardly know how to get to the end of the month.

At times it makes me quite melancholy that the result remains always "unsaleable."

But I go on, and harden myself against it.

Others have had to bear it as well. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

Has there not been a number of Lhermitte this May?

I repeat—work in spite of all *indifference*—it is not easy to keep it up, but that which is easy, is not worth much.

Painting rural life is a thing that will keep its value, and the fight won by others *continues* all the same, and one can win it anew. Far from there being too many painters of rural life—in my opinion, it would be better to have some hundreds more.

It is no bad idea that in France they are decorating the town-halls with subjects from rural life, like a number of pictures at the Salon. I suppose they will carry it on still further.

But—better still is it that the pictures of peasants come into the *houses* in the magazines and other reproductions, directly among the people.

And so it is only a passing fit, when I feel discouraged.

At home I heard that you had written them something about Serret, his having said that I could count on his sympathy, etc. Is Serret a painter, a dealer or an amateur? Up till now I don't know anything about him. I wanted to put *Germinal* in the box with the pictures, but after all I was afraid it would fall in between and get damaged. But I will put it in the next box or return it by post, I think it splendid.

413

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. It was just what I wanted and helped me to work at the end of the month as hard as I did in the beginning.

I am very glad to hear that Serret is a painter, about whom you had already written things which I perfectly well remember, but the name had escaped me. I should like to write to you much more than I shall do in this letter, but of late, when I come home,

I don't feel like writing, when I have been sitting in the sun all day. As to what Serret says, I quite agree with him—I just send him a line, because I should like to become friends with him. As I told you already, I am very busy drawing figures of late; I will send them especially for the sake of Serret, to show him that I am far from indifferent to the unity and the form of a figure.

Do you ever see Wallis, is that water-colour of the auction perhaps something for him, if it were something for Wisselingh, then he would certainly be the first to take it. To Wisselingh I once gave a few heads and recently I have sent him that lithograph. But as he did not answer with a single word, I think if I sent him something again, I should get nothing but an insult.

It just happened to me that Van Rappard, with whom I have been friends for years, after keeping silent for about three months, writes me a letter, so haughty and so full of insults and so clearly written after he had been in the Hague, that I am almost sure I have lost him for ever as a friend.

Just because I tried it first at the Hague, that is in my own country, I have full right and cause to forget all those worries and to think of something else outside my own country.

You know Wallis well, perhaps you can broach the subject à propos of that water-colour, but act according to circumstances. If I could earn something with my work, if we had some firm ground, be it ever so little, under our feet for our daily existence, and if then the desire to become an artist took for you the form of let me say, Hennebeau in *Germinal*, save all difference in age, etc.—what pictures you could still make then! The future is always different from what one expects, so one never can be sure. The drawback of painting is that, if one does not sell one's pictures, one yet needs money for paint and models in order to make progress. And that drawback is a bad thing. But for the rest, painting and, in my opinion, especially painting rural life, gives serenity, though one may have all kinds of worries and miseries on the surface of life. I mean painting is a *home* and one does not feel that homesickness, that peculiar feeling Hennebeau had. That passage I copied for you lately has struck me particularly, because at the time I had almost literally the same longing to be something like a grassmower or a navvy.

And I was sick of the *boredom* of civilization. It *is* better, one

is happier if one carries it out—literally though—one feels at least one is really alive. And it is a good thing in winter to be deep in the snow, in the autumn deep in the yellow leaves, in summer among the ripe corn, in spring amid the grass, it is a good thing to be always with the mowers and the peasant girls, in summer with a big sky overhead, in winter by the fireside and to feel that it has always been and will always be so.

One may sleep on straw, eat black bread, well, one will only be the healthier for it.

I should like to write more, but I repeat, I am not in a mood for writing, and I wanted to enclose still a note for Serret, which you must read also, because I write in it about what I want to send ere-long, especially because I want to show Serret my definite figure studies. Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

Serret may agree with you that to paint good pictures and to sell them, are two separate things. But it is not at all true. When at last the public saw Millet, all his work together, then the public, both at Paris and in London was enthusiastic. And who were the persons that had made obstruction and refused Millet? The art dealers, the so-called *experts*.

414

Dear Theo,

To-day being Sunday, I want to write you again.

Because I still forgot to say something of Uhde's picture:  
*Laissez venir à moi les petits enfants.*

Yes, I like it, but it is not new.

And I prefer interiors in a bright tone with peasant children, *without* a mystic figure of Christ, like Israël or Artz paint them to this one, where one gets a mystic Christ into the bargain.

The children are very expressive—but are they better than those by Labrichon, Frère or even Knaus, Vautier (in their best period)?

Do not think this little, for all those people I name were, especially formerly, extraordinarily clever in expressing character.

My objection to Uhde's picture is that there is a certain coldness in it, like in the new brick houses, and schools and churches of the Methodists. And notwithstanding the great merits of the picture, excuse me, but it makes me long for the less orthodox style of painting of Decamps or Isabey.

There is after all something consumptive in it, and I think a Corot, a Dupré, a Millet infinitely healthier in tone.

But I can only judge from the reproduction, perhaps if I saw the picture, I would get more reconciled to it as to technique.

You know how much I like the luminous painters too, but you see it goes too far and Mantz expresses it very subtly, when he says: "Ceux qui rêvent toujours partout le maximum des clairs, trouveraient d'une intensité un peu noire les verts de M. Harpignies."

Exactly, that is it: They begin to find heresy in every effect against a strong and coloured light, in every cast shadow—they seem never to walk early in the morning or in the evening by sunset—they want to see nothing but full daylight, or gaslight, or even electric light!

Now, on me the effect of all this is that I sometimes detect in myself a longing to see things like, for instance, "The Moving Out," by Nuyen, like an old Leys, like a Cabat, a Diaz, or Lepoitevin.

Perhaps you will call this nothing but my being always in the opposition. But I begin to admit that I find Uhde's picture very good, only having found it so, it leaves an after-taste that is not altogether pleasant, at least not cheering, because that kind of painters generally don't improve in their later pictures.

Well, it is a typical picture for the house Goupil & Co.; of their best. Knaus they have also had at Goupil's and Labrichon too. I assure you that I do not systematically despise all this, far from it. Does it express what I mean, when I say it thus: "It is a *good* picture of M. Goupil & Co.'s?" Does it express what I mean, when I say: "Beaucoup, mais *beaucoup* de talent—autant que possible du génie? *Non.*"

This picture by Uhde is much more German (notice in Mantz' article how slyly he chaffs Meyerheim, "nature mortier." Did you notice it?) I repeat much more German than it seems.

Oh, those wise, those new, those arrogant people of the new progress, who criticize Harpignies, I am sure that you cannot



stand it either and in *character* they are a new edition of Monnier's M. Prudhomme.

To speak about something more animating. I enclose a wood-cut after Clausen, he began rather in a German style, but has improved, like Neuhuys also often improved.

The reason why I send you this little print is—here you have at last something of the English art, which reminds me of work by Pinwell and Fred. Walker. It is different from Millet, but you will see, however long you look at it, it never bores you.

Don't throw it away, for one so seldom sees something of that rare art, which one must not mistake for Bridgmann, for instance.

And the other little print, though less manly of conception is mighty good as to sentiment and also quite original.

I am daily working hard on drawing figures. But I must have a hundred of them, even more, before I have done with it. I want to find something, different from my old drawings and to grasp the character of the peasants—especially those from this neighbourhood.

And it is about harvest time and then I must make a campaign both of reaping the corn and of digging the potatoes. At that time it is twice as hard to get models and yet it is necessary, for I get more and more convinced that one cannot be too conscientious, that one must once and for ever exert oneself on what Daudet calls "the search for the model" (in "L'Histoire de mon Livre," an article about "les rois en exil" which I just read).

I should like to show Serret also the studies of the harvest. Therefore I cannot tell exactly when I shall be able to send the portfolio with studies from the model. But at all events it will be soon. I hope also to send before the harvest, about three more cottages, painted studies, like those last ones. Am I wrong when I think there is some good in the old tower? Have you varnished it already?

Both are dry enough now for a little varnish, and *want it badly*, because both are painted over another thing. Can you fix approximately anything about the time of your coming? And are there no new Lhermites? Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I repeat, there are but too many examples of the very luminous painters, becoming afterwards chalky or oily, it is because I noticed this so often that I make a certain restriction, that I cannot altogether admire Uhde's picture. "The Two Blacksmiths" by Rafaëlli are very beautiful.

415

Dear Theo,

I had a visit to-day of Wenkebach, a painter from Utrecht, who is a friend of Rappard's. He is a landscape painter and I often saw his name mentioned and he received a medal in London at the same time with Rappard. He has seen my work, those cottages which I am going to send you and also the drawings of figures.

I told him I was sorry to say there had been misunderstandings between Rappard and me, which I could hardly explain otherwise, than that he had been chaffing at my work with other people from the Hague, and as he had not seen anything of it for a long time he had involuntarily been turned against me. I showed Wenkebach figures which Rappard used to like, and at the same time the new ones, and showed him that indeed I had changed in some respects and would change still more, but that what I made now was certainly not inferior.

Then he said that he did not doubt but Rappard would take back what he had written.

Then I showed him that, as to colour, I certainly do not want to paint *always* dark. Some of the cottages are even quite clear.

But that my aim is to proceed from the primary colours: red, blue, yellow and not from grey.

We had a long discussion about colour, and among other things he said, he had noticed how Jaap Maris in old water-colours also frequently used ruddy, brownish grey, red colours. So that if one puts them beside one of his present drawings, they become quite red.

It is the same with Israëls.

Perhaps I do more harm than good now by telling you this, because it is but part of a conversation, and I ought to tell the whole of it. But we have spoken about it before, so you will perhaps understand it in its real connection. In order to get an *honest*,

*sound palette, to stick to it*, it is necessary to practise also the stronger gamuts, and to continue to use them, especially in these days, when imitators (not the masters themselves) of the great painters in *grey* want to paint more and more, always and everything *clear*.

So Wenkebach said, for instance, that he liked the picture of the old tower also for its technique, I painted it last year, with a lot of bitumen in it. He said he found it quite original.

The same with other old things. That water-mill, the plough with oxen, the avenue with autumn effect.

But what pleased me most of all, was that he liked the figures. He called them Millet-like. But I know for sure that I will get them better still, if only I have some chance with the money, and can continue to work on them full speed, but that is what rather worries me and, for this month I am *absolutely* pinched. I am literally without a penny.

We shall have hard times, it is not all my fault, but only by perseverance we still have a chance of reaping, after some time, what we are sowing.

And it worries me enough that you have all that money trouble, I wish I could lighten it somewhat for you.

When you come over to Holland, would it not be the right thing to try Tersteeg once more?

Tersteeg is a man who *dares*; once he is convinced, he is all right. And the same with Mauve.

If there were many people who persevere in *studying* the figure, I should say there is little chance of finding help.

But they are not so very numerous, and yet they are not less necessary than formerly.

For you alone, it is hard to hold out, and I cannot do anything to lessen the expenses, on the contrary, I wish I could take more models still. What is to be done?

One must not call it fighting the impossible, for others have won, and we too shall win.

As to Rappard, I just wrote him, I want him to retract absolutely what he has written. But you see, Theo, how much depends on being up to the scratch in one's work.

I wrote to Rappard, that actually we have to fight other things than each other, and that at this moment those who paint rural life and the people must join hands because union is strength.

At least, alone one cannot do it, a whole group that is like-minded can do more. You too must keep good courage for perhaps we will make more friends and then it becomes more animated, and perhaps the mutual discord will change into a peasant's war against that kind of painters which one finds in every jury at present, who, if they could, would even now obstruct the ideas for which Millet was the pioneer.

Good-bye, if you can, send me something, be it only 10 frs., to help me through these last days of the month.

Yours,  
Vincent.

416

Dear Theo,

(July 6 '85.)

Thanks for the money, your letter and the catalogue Raffaëlli. I think the drawings in it masterly. What he himself says further about "le caractéristique" is interesting.

His article is a mixture of very simple words, that come from the heart and from a nervous artistic sentiment; those are striking. And further—of words which, I think, Raffaëlli himself understands as little as those who must read it. So it is an article full of very fine things, and full of mistakes. That's what I like to read better than anything else. For that which he talks about is so intensely complicated.

Yet the substance of what he says is satisfactory in the reading, and with all his queer sallies, he says something that is healthy and true.

Theo, you must not think that if I saw Uhde's picture myself I should lose the impression I got from it. I repeat, I think it will be with this man as with Knaus and Labrichon. After a few things of character, it will be the very technique that plays them false, that is to say, he will become more and more correct in his work and more and more dry.

In my opinion, Raffaëlli as a painter ranks much higher than Uhde.

You do not hear me utter pessimistic doubts about Lhermitte, do you? So I am not a man who always doubts. On the contrary, in some people I have a very strong confidence.

Of Raffaëlli, I had never seen anything but those two blacksmiths, when I wrote to you already about it.

Raffaëlli, but especially Lhermitte possess that what Raffaëlli calls "conscience."

I am afraid that this will be the weak point of Uhde, that he will no longer know his own mind.

In fine, you say that the silvery grey of Uhde is so beautiful and that if I saw the picture I would think differently about it.

No, lad—I have seen so much grey in my life that such a bit of silver-grey cannot so easily bring me round as it used to do.

Painting grey as *a system* becomes intolerable, and we shall certainly get the reverse side of the shield of it.

Yet in order to convince you that I want to appreciate its good qualities, and have nothing against it, I have just now also a grey picture on hand. We will involuntarily discuss these things further some day. Do not forget however, that though I have some objections against Uhde, yet I admit that I certainly admire the principal part of *this* picture, which forms three-quarters of it—the children.

I must set out on my work—I did not want to defer writing any longer, I am dog-tired every day, because I have to go far, far across the heath!

I have also made some more figures.

I am very sorry to hear what you said about the money, that you will be very hard up yourself.

Painting sometimes is so deuced expensive, and in the present days especially it is so necessary to follow one's own idea, *coûte que coûte*.

"Il nous faut un art de force vivre," Raffaëlli says, and in order to reach that aim in figure drawing it costs a lot of trouble to find models.

The time is gone, and I don't want it back, when it was sufficient for a figure to be academically, conventionally correct, or rather, though many still ask for this, a reaction is coming—and I hope it will make some stir. The artists call for character, well—the public will do the same.

I assure you that Uhde's Christ is very, very poor indeed, it is below the mark—the children are good.

I like Lhermitte so much and Raffaëlli, because their work is so thoroughly logical, sensible and honest!



I have here before me, some figures, a woman with a spade, seen from behind, another bending to glean the corn ears, another seen from the front, her head almost on the ground, who is digging carrots. I have been watching those peasant figures here for more than a year and a half, especially their action, just to catch their character. Therefore I cannot stand such a Santa Klaus as Udhe painted in that little school—the little school in itself is very beautiful though. Udhe himself—well I am sure that he knows it quite well, and that he has only done so because the honourable people in the country where he lives want a subject and something (conventional) to think about, and otherwise he would have to starve. If I can find a moment one of these days, when I am not too tired to write, I will try to tell you once again how splendid I find some things in Raffaëlli. Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

417

Dear Theo,

The last time I wrote you I was in such a hurry. I need all my time at present, because I am at work quite two hours from here. What I want is to have some more beautiful huts far away on the heath. I have now four, as large as the two I sent you last, and a few smaller ones. They are not yet dry, and I think I shall give them the finishing touch in the studio. But then I want to send them to you together with some figure studies, to show the latter to Serret. But now I want to tell you that I intend, as there are about six rather large paintings, for the present to make only small ones. Especially, because according to what Raffaëlli and Mantz and other articles say, there were at the last Salon and in general a great many enormous canvases.

Though I did not read this in one of the articles, this Salon might perhaps be called: “Le Salon des marchands de couleur.”

I should like to send you this lot before you come here, because otherwise it will last so long.

And then I shall take up quite different subjects again.

I think that you will see from the things I brought from the

heath that it is very typical there. The interiors are splendid, and now I have made some friends there among the people, where I am always free to come.

How did it turn out for you this month with the money? I hope a little better than you expected, for it worried me when you wrote that you were hard up yourself. I had to pay so much in the beginning of this month and have only just five guilders left. And it is still long before the end of the month.

And next month I have again much to pay. I can and may not do otherwise than spend relatively much on models.

It is here as everywhere, people do not like to pose, and if it were not for the money, *nobody* would do so.

But as they are for the greater part very poor, and especially many weavers are out of work, I can somehow manage to get them. But to paint what I want, and especially to improve the figures, is a question of money.

Did you read in the book of Sensier that when Millet had the chance of inheriting some thousand frs., instead of using it, to make himself a little more comfortable—indeed he was poor enough—he immediately set out on a trip to his native village, in order to paint anew the peasants there, and it swallowed up his whole legacy, and *Millet was right*.

Others did the same—for instance, Paul Dubois, who spent his whole patrimony on models, and was for a time quite melancholy because of money worries.

But I have not any legacy to expect—and I cannot do as I should like.

But pardon me—when I say that if Serret and you—and very justly too—want to see still other qualities in my figures, I shall have to spend more on my models. I do not know how people manage to fill the Salon with yards and yards of canvas. Well, among those cottages there are a few which I have painted much clearer, but I repeat, however much I may like grey pictures, I appreciate more and more the people who besides the silver-grey gamut also paint the more gloomy effects.

What I shall do now—if the month turns out a little better than you expected, and if you can send some extra, be it ever so little—is to send you the four pictures. Otherwise—I have not the money to send them. But in that case I will send them as soon as I have

the money for next month, and, at all events, before that time, the figure studies to show Serret.

But I hope you will bring those figure studies back, when you come. For there will come a great many more which I need for painting.

I shall want them for figures, which are definitely not larger than, for instance, a hand's breadth and even less—so that everything in it becomes more concentrated still.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,  
Vincent.

418

Dear Theo,

I wish the four pictures of which I wrote were gone.

If I keep them here long, I might paint them over again, and I think it would be better if you got them just as they come from the heath.

The reason why I do not send them is that I don't want to send them unfranchised at a moment in which yourself are pinched perhaps, and yet I cannot pay the charge myself.

The little house in which Millet lived, I have never seen it, but I imagine that those four little human nests are of the same kind.

One is the residence of a gentleman, who is known under the name of the "mourning peasant"; the other is inhabited by a "good woman," who when I came there, did no other more mysterious thing than dig her potato pit, but she must also be able to do witchcraft, at any rate, she bears the name of "the witch-head."

You remember in the book of Gigoux, how it happened to Delacroix that 17 pictures were refused at the same time. One sees from this,—at least I think so—that he and others of that period—placed before connoisseurs and not-connoisseurs, who none of them either understood or would buy—one sees from this, that those who in the book are rightly called the valiant, did not call it fighting the impossible, but went on painting. What I wanted to tell you once more, is that if we take that story of Delacroix as

a starting-point, we must still paint a lot. I am in the necessity of being the most disagreeable of all persons, namely I have to ask for money.

And as I do not think things will all at once take a turn for the better as to selling, this is bad enough. But I ask you, is it not better after all for both of us to work hard, though it will bring difficulties, than to sit and philosophize in a time like this?

I do not know the future, Theo, but I do know the eternal law that everything changes; go back ten years, and things were different, the conditions, the sentiment of the people, well everything. And ten years hence, things will have turned again, I am sure.

But the thing one does, remains, and one does not easily repent having done a thing. The more active the better, and I would rather have a failure than sit and do nothing.

Whether Portier may or may not be the man who can do something with my work, now we want him at any rate. And this is what I believe. After having worked for a year or so, we shall have a larger collection than now, and I know for sure that my work will show the better, the more I complete it. People, who now have some sympathy for it, who speak of it as he does and show it, they are useful because after my having worked, for instance, another year, they will have collected a few things, that will speak for themselves, even if they were totally silent about them. If you happen to see Portier, tell him, that far from giving it up, I intend to send him much more. You must also continue to show the things if you meet likely people.

It won't be so very long before the things we can show will become more important. You will notice yourself, and it is a fact which pleases me enormously, that more and more they begin to arrange exhibitions of one person or of a very few, who belong together.

This is a fact in the world of art, which I am sure contains more promise for the future than any other undertaking. It is a good thing they begin to understand, that a Bougereau does not show off well next to a Jacque, a figure of Beyle or Lhermitte does not do beside a Schelfhout or Koekkoek. Disperse the drawings of Raffaelli and judge for yourself whether it would be possible to get a good idea of that original artist.

He—Raffaëlli—is different from Regamey, but I think him as characteristic a personality.

If I kept my work here, I think I would go on repainting it.

When I send it to you and to Portier just as it comes from the open air or from the cottages, there will be now and then one among them which is no good, but things will be kept together, which would not improve if they were often repainted.

Now if you have these four canvases and a few smaller studies of cottages besides, and somebody saw no other work of mine but these, he would of course think that I painted nothing but cottages. And it would be the same for the series of heads. But rural life includes so many different things that when Millet speaks about “travailler comme plusieurs nègres” this really must be the case, if one wants to complete the thing.

One may laugh at Courbet’s saying “peindre des anges, qui est-ce qui a vu des anges?” but I should like to add, for instance: “des justices au harem, qui est-ce qui a vu des justices au harem.<sup>1</sup> Des combats de taureaux, qui est-ce qui en a vu?” and so many other Moorish, Spanish things, Cardinals, and then all those historical paintings, which they keep on painting and painting, yards by yards. What is the use of it and why do they do it? After a few years it generally gets musty and dull, and becomes more and more uninteresting.

Well! Perhaps they are well painted, they may be; nowadays when critics stand before a picture, like that of Benjamin Constant, like a reception at the Cardinal’s by I don’t know what Spaniard, it is the custom to speak with a philosophical air about “clever technic.” But as soon as those very same critics would come before a picture of rural life, or before a drawing of, for instance, Raffaëlli, they would criticize the technic with the selfsame air.

You think perhaps I am wrong to criticize this, but it strikes me so, that all those foreign pictures are painted *in the studio*.

But just go and paint out of doors on the spot itself! then all kinds of things happen; for instance, from the four paintings which you will receive, I had to wipe off at least a hundred and more flies, not counting the dust and sand, not counting that when one carries them for some hours across the heath and through the hedges, some thorns will scratch them, etc. Not counting that when one

<sup>1</sup> Picture by Benjamin Constant.



arrives on the heath after some hours' walk in this weather, one is tired and exhausted from the heat. Not counting that the figures do not stand still like the professional models, and that the effects one wants to catch change with the progressing day.

I don't know how it is with you, but as for myself, the more I work in it, the more I get absorbed by rural life. And I begin to care less and less either for those Cabanel-like things among which I reckon also Jacquet, and also Benjamin Constant from the present days, or the so highly praised, but so inexpressibly dreadfully dry technic of the Italians and Spaniards. *Imagiers!* that word of Jacque's I often think of it. Yet I have no *partie pris*, I feel for Raffaëlli who paints quite other things than peasants, I feel for Alfred Stevens, for Tissot, to name something quite different from peasants; I feel for a beautiful portrait.

Zola, though in my opinion he makes colossal blunders in his judgment about pictures, says in "Mes Haines" a beautiful thing about art in general: "dans le tableau (l'œuvre d'art) je cherche, j'aime l'homme—l'artiste."

Look here, I think this perfectly true; I ask you what kind of a man, what kind of a prophet, or philosopher, observer, what kind of a human character is there behind certain paintings, the technic of which is praised; in fact, often *nothing*. But a Raffaëlli is a personality, Lhermitte is a personality, and before many pictures of almost unknown artists, one feels they are made with a *will*, a *feeling*, a passion and love. The technic of a painting from rural life or—like Raffaëlli—from the heart of the city workmen—brings quite other difficulties than those of the smooth painting and pose of a Jacquet or Benjamin Constant. It means to live in those cottages day by day, to be in the fields like the peasants, in summer in the heat of the sun, in winter to suffer from snow and frost, not indoors but outside, and not during a walk, but day after day like the peasants themselves.

And I ask you if one considers these things, am I then so far wrong when I criticize the criticism of those critics who in these days more than ever talk humbug about this so *often* misused word: technic (it is getting more and more a conventional signification). Considering all the trouble and drudgery needed to paint the "rouw-boerke"<sup>1</sup> and his cottage, I dare maintain that this is a longer and

<sup>1</sup> Peasant in mourning.

more fatiguing journey than many painters of exotic subjects (maybe *La justice au harem*, or reception at a Cardinal's) make for their most selected eccentric subjects. For in Paris any kind of Arabic or Spanish or Moorish models are to be had if one only pays for them. But he who paints the rag-pickers of Paris like Raffaëlli in their *own quarter*, has far more difficulties and his work is more serious.

*Apparently nothing is more simple than to paint peasants, rag-pickers and labourers of all kinds, but—no subjects in painting are so difficult as these everyday figures !*

As far as I know there is not a single academy where one learns to draw and paint a digger, a sower, a woman who puts the kettle over the fire, or a seamstress. But in every city of some importance there is an academy with a choice of models for historical, Arabic, Louis XV, in one word *all not really existing figures*.

When I shall send to you and Serret some studies of diggers or peasant women who weed, glean, etc., *as the beginning* of a whole series of all kinds of work in the fields, then it may be that either you or Serret will discover faults in them, which will be useful for me to know, and which I shall perhaps admit myself.

But I want to point out something which perhaps is worth while. All academical figures are constructed in the same way and let us say, *on ne peut mieux*. Irreproachably *faultless*. You will guess what I am driving at, they do not reveal to us anything new.

This does not count for the figures of a Millet, a Lhermitte, a Regamey, a Daumier; they too are well constructed, but after all in a different way than the academy teaches.

But I think how correctly academical a figure may be, it will be superfluous in these days, though it were by Ingres himself (his "Source" however excepted, because that really was, and is, and will always remain something new), when it lacks the essential modern note, the intimate character, the real *action*.

Perhaps you will ask, when will a figure not be superfluous, though there may be faults, great faults in it in my opinion.

When the digger digs, when the peasant is a peasant and the peasant woman a peasant woman.

Is this something new—yes—even the figures by Ostade, Terburg are not in action like those painted nowadays.

I should like to say a lot more about this, and I should like to

say how much I myself want to improve my work and how much I prefer the work of some other artists to my own.

I ask you do you know in the old Dutch school a single digger, a single sower??? Did they ever try to paint "a labourer"? Did Velasquez try it in his Water-carrier or types from the people? No.

The figures in the pictures of the old masters do not *work*. I am drudging just now on the figure of a woman whom I saw last winter picking carrots in the snow.

Look here, Millet has done it, Lhermitte, and in general the painters of rural life in this century—Israëls for instance—they like it better than anything else.

But *even* in this century, how relatively few among the innumerable painters want the figure—yes above all—for the sake of the *figure*, that is to say for the sake of line and modelling, *but cannot imagine* it otherwise than in action, and want to do what the old masters avoided—even the old Dutch masters who clung to many conventional actions—and I repeat—who want *to paint the action for the sake of the action*.

So that the picture or the drawing has to be a drawing of figure for the sake of the figure and the inexpressibly harmonious form of the human body, but at the same time a picking of carrots in the snow. Do I express myself clearly? I hope so, and just tell this to Serret. I can say it in a few words, a nude by Cabanel, a lady by Jacquet and a peasant woman *not by Bastien Lepage himself*, but a peasant woman by a Parisian, who has learned drawing at the academy, will always indicate the limbs and the structure of the body in one selfsame way, sometimes charming—correct in proportion and anatomy. But when Israëls, or when Daumier or Lhermitte for instance draw a figure, the shape of the figure will be felt much more, and yet that is the reason why I like to name Daumier with them, the proportions will be sometimes almost *arbitrary*, the anatomy and structure often quite wrong "in the eyes of the academician." But it will *live*. And especially Delacroix too.

It is not yet well expressed. Tell Serret that *I should be desperate if my figures were correct*, tell him that I do not want them to be academically correct, tell him that I mean if one photographs a digger *he certainly would not dig then*. Tell him that I adore the

figures by Michaelangelo though the legs are undoubtedly too long, the hips and the backsides too large. Tell him that for me, Millet and Lhermitte are the real artists, for the very reason that they do not paint things as they are, traced in a dry analytical way, but as *they*: Millet, Lhermitte, Michaelangelo feel them. Tell him that my great longing is to learn to make those very incorrectnesses, those deviations, remodellings, changes of reality, that they may become, yes, untruth if you like—but more true than the literal truth.

And now I shall have to finish, but I wanted to say once more that those who paint rural life or the life of the people, though they may not belong to the men of the moment, yet perhaps in the long run, they will hold out longer than the painters of the exotic harems and Cardinal's receptions, painted in Paris.

I know that it is being very disagreeable to ask for money at inconvenient moments; my excuse, however, is that painting the apparently most common things, is sometimes the most difficult and the most expensive.

*The expenses which I must make if I want to work* are sometimes very high in proportion to what I have at my disposal. I assure you, if my constitution had not become in all winds and weather like that of a peasant, I should not be able to stand it, as for my own comfort absolutely nothing is left.

But I don't want comfort for myself, just as little as many peasants don't want to live differently than they do.

But what I ask, is for colours, and especially for models.

From what I write about the drawings of the figure, you can perhaps judge sufficiently how passionately I want to carry them out.

You recently wrote to me that Serret had spoken to you "with conviction" about certain faults in the structure of the figures of the potato-eaters.

But you will have seen from my answer, that my own criticism also disapproves of them on that point, but I pointed out that this was an impression after my having seen the cottage in the dim lamplight for many evenings, after having painted forty heads, so it is clear that I started from a different point of view.

But now that we begin to speak about figure drawing, I have a great deal more to say. In Raffaelli's words, I find his opinion

about "character" what he says about this is good, and in its place and it is illustrated by the drawings themselves.

But people who move in artistic, literary circles, like Raffaëlli in Paris, have after all different ideas than I, for instance, here in the heart of peasant life.

I mean they want one word that compasses all their ideas; he uses for the figures of the future, the word character. I agree with it, with the meaning I think, but in the correctness of the word I believe as little as in the correctness of other words; as little as in the correctness or efficiency of my own expressions.

Rather than to say there must be character in a digger, I circumscribe it by saying, that peasant *must* be a peasant, that digger *must* dig, and then there will be something essentially modern in them. But I feel myself that from these very words conclusions may be drawn that I do not mean, though I might say a lot more.

Instead of diminishing the expenses for models, now already so heavy for me, I think it better, much better, to spend a little more on them, for what I aim at is quite a different thing than to be able to do a little figure drawing. To draw a peasant's figure in action, I repeat, that's an essentially modern figure, the very heart of modern art, what neither the Greeks nor the Renaissance nor the old Dutch school have done.

This is a question which occupies me daily. But this difference between the great as well as the little masters of to-day (the great ones as, for instance, Millet, Lhermitte, Breton, Herkomer: the little ones such as Raffaëlli and Regamey) and the old masters, I have not often found it openly expressed in the articles about art.

Just think it over if you don't find this to be true. They started a peasant's and a labourer's figure as a "genre," but at present with Millet the great master as leader, this is the very heart of modern art, and will remain so.

People like Daumier, we must respect them for they are among the pioneers. The simple *nude* but *modern* figure, like Henner and Lefèvre have renewed it, ranks high.

Baudry and especially the sculptors, as, for instance, Mercier, Dalou, that too is serious work.

But peasants and labourers are after all not nude, and it is no good imagining them nude. The more painters begin to paint labourers and peasants' figures, the better I shall like it. And I



myself know nothing I like as well. This is a long letter and I do not know whether I have expressed clearly enough what I mean. I shall perhaps write a little word to Serret, if I do so, I shall send the letter for you to read, for I should like to make it very clear how much I care for that question of figure drawing.

419

Dear Theo,

August, '85.

Just a line to welcome you, I wish it would be convenient to you to drop in with your friend Bonger this afternoon before dinner, let us say between 3 and 5.

I thought this would perhaps be the best, as you will then be free to spend the whole evening at home.

I am rather busy, as they are mowing the corn in the fields, for, as you know, this lasts but a few days, and it is almost one of the most beautiful things.

But I will take care to be in the studio between 3 and 5.

In the evening I'll drop in at mother's for a little chat.

But for the rest, you must not be offended when I go on with my work.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

420

Dear Theo,

That colour dealer writes to me that I can send him the pictures. But he wants me to send them as soon as possible, because there are many foreigners at the Hague just now. There he is perfectly right.

Now I must beg you to try and send me sufficient money to have a box made, and to pay the carriage. Deduct it from the next month's allowance if you like, but I haven't got a cent and I want to send the pictures at once.

Your visit has really left me no comforting impression, I believe

more than ever that more difficulties are threatening you for the first coming years than you suppose. . . .

I wish you were or would become a painter.

I say this straight out, more emphatically than before, because I really believe that the great art-dealing is in many respects a speculation like the bulb-trade was.

In my opinion, at least, it is just now the moment to try to do something with my work. I have looked for addresses in Antwerp, too, and expect to hear shortly more definitely from there. Then I could probably send something there, too. But should you know of anything, help me to carry it out.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

421

Dear Theo,

To my letter of the day before yesterday I want to add, that yesterday I received a letter from Rappard, and that our quarrel has been quite made up, that he has sent me a sketch of a large picture of a brickyard which he is painting. It looks very original, if you wanted to name other pictures in the same style, it would be, for instance, Meunier whose miners you saw in Antwerp.

He has taken a small house outside Utrecht, close to the brickyard, nothing but a studio (with a skylight) he also intends to go back to Terschelling, so he is again quite absorbed in nature and in my opinion, that is better than to work in the city. But I want to tell you that I hope we two shall also come to a better understanding. Just as little as I could accept his criticism can I be satisfied with the present condition in which I am too much hampered in my work by my financial difficulties.

I don't want you alone to put this right, but I simply want that we together (and not I alone) do our best to improve the situation. I know that for you too, it costs trouble and is not easy and as such I readily appreciate it, but to take trouble for a certain aim is no misfortune, and to have to fight is the condition of every honest victory.

The expenses of painting cannot always be avoided, and not to

make them is *not* always the best policy, for if one hesitated to take models or to buy the necessary painting materials, no serious work could result.

And as things are getting worse and worse for me, instead of better, they finally get so bad that I really must complain.

And I repeat let us keep that little painting business of mine in good order, for sooner or later we may need it badly. If storm is threatening, one must keep the boats in good order.

That man in the Hague is Leurs, he does not live any longer in the Practizijnshoek, but in the Molenstraat.

He begs me to send him more than one picture in order to have more than one chance and he offers me his two show-windows. And as he himself is very much in need of money, he will not spare trouble.

I sent him a few cottages, the old churchtower and some smaller studies with figures.

And while these are on show, I shall make some new ones to keep things going.

There is some chance of also getting a second man at the Hague. But the principal thing for me is to be able *to go on with my work*. Since you left, I have made another little picture of the harvest, of the size of those carrot-pickers in the snow—a mower, a woman who binds sheaves, and the mill, like those drawings you saw. An evening effect after sunset.

I also made some studies of interiors.

Once more I beg you to talk it over with Portier and Serret, to tell them that I am rather hard up, to animate them to try their best, that I for my part shall try to send them new things.

And let us manage to forward the box.

I have painted three more studies of women in the potato fields, of which you already saw the first one.

Rappard had seen Wenkebach and in his letter there was no longer any trace of the tone which he had tried to adopt at first. And though he is going to Terschelling first, he writes about coming to paint some studies here.

Good-bye, and wishing you good luck,

Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,

I received in good order your letter and enclosed 20 francs. Many thanks. Now I can tell you that I sent off to Leurs the box, containing seven paintings of different subjects, and to make it more complete, I added twelve smaller painted studies. I also wrote to Wisselingh that I had sent those pictures, and asked him to go and see them. Yet I am still sorry that these pictures did not go to you.

If we had paid off Leurs and you had taken these pictures and if you had got too many of one kind, we might have picked out some from the different sendings to show in Holland, then the things that remained with you would have been of the very best, a centre gradually to be enlarged as we made progress. But, as you say, it is no use crying over spilt milk. In provisional answer to what you write about being convinced as to *not having gone too far yet in economizing*, your ledger can prove this in case the expenses are greater than the profits. Perhaps so. But the reason? Yes the folks at home, but lad, *you can't keep it up as you do now*. I suffer through it I assure you, but if need be, I will consent to being still poorer than I was in former years. But does it make them at home happier and are they any better off?

Really, when I think of my own experience, when I think how my working for some years at Goupil's & Co., ended in my being drawn very strongly towards home, when I think how there followed for me a crisis absolutely bewildering and which soon left me quite alone, *and how everything and everybody* I had formerly relied upon, changed and collapsed entirely. When I think of those melancholy times I am so afraid that the present will prove to you no firm ground under your feet. I speak as somebody who has known struggle, and is in the midst of the fight. Well, with every new year time seems to go quicker, more things seem to happen, things go in a greater rush.

It is often so with me, that I have to fight against rather serious troubles, very far from being prosperous.

Well—but the more unfavourable outward circumstances become, the more the inner resources, that is the love for the work

increases. And if no new resources, yet new—renewed—chances offer themselves in short.

As I told you I added to this little package of drawings a few new ones, but I will try to make several more this month, of the size of that woman shelling peas, which was the last one I made.

Good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent.

423

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and enclosed 150 francs. I also received to-day the two Lhermittes. He absolutely masters the figure, he does with it what he likes—proceeding neither from the colour nor from the local tone but rather from the light—as Rembrandt did—there is an astonishing mastership in everything he does, excelling above all in modelling, he perfectly satisfies all that honesty demands. People talk much about Poussin.

Bracquemond also speaks about him. The French call Poussin the very greatest painter among the old masters. Well it is certainly true, that what is said about Poussin, of whom I know so very little, is also true of Lhermitte and Millet. But with this difference, that Poussin seems to me the original grain, the others the full ear. As for me, I think the modern ones *the most superior*.

These last two weeks I had a lot of worry from the priests, who told me, evidently with the best intentions, and feeling themselves obliged like other people to meddle with it, that I ought not to get too familiar with people below my rank; expressing themselves to *me* in these terms but using towards “the people of lower rank” quite a different tone, namely, forbidding them to have themselves painted. I simply told it at once to the Burgomaster and pointed out to him that it was a thing that did not concern the priests at all, who have to keep to their own territory of more abstract things.

At all events, they stopped their opposition for the moment and I hope it will remain so. A girl I had often painted was with child, and they suspected me, though it was not so.

But I had heard from the girl herself the real state of affairs,



and as it was a case in which a member of the priest's congregation had played a very ugly part, they cannot, at least this once, get any hold on me.

But you see that it is not easy to paint or draw people in their own houses and at their work.

Well they will not easily get the better of me in this case, and I hope to keep this winter the very same models, who are thoroughly typical of the old Brabant race.

I have again a few new drawings. But I could by no means get anybody to pose for me in the fields these days.

Happily for me, the priest is getting rather unpopular. But it is a bad thing, and if it continued, I should have to move. You will ask, what's the use of making yourself disagreeable—but sometimes it cannot be avoided. If I had argued gently with them, they would undoubtedly have got the better of me. And when they hinder me in my work, I sometimes do not see any other way than eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. The priest even went so far as to promise the people money if they refused to be painted: but they answered quite pertly that they would rather earn money from me than beg some from him.

But you see they do it only for the sake of earning money, and they do *nothing* for *nothing* here.

You ask me if Rappard has ever sold anything. I know that at present he is better off than he used to be, that, for instance, he took for sometime daily models for the nude, that now, for the sake of a picture of a brickyard, he rented a small house on the spot itself, and had it improved with a skylight; I know that he made again a trip through Drenthe, and that he also will go to Terschelling. All these things are rather expensive, and the money for it must come from somewhere. Though he may possess some money of his own, he must certainly earn something too, otherwise he couldn't do what he does. Perhaps his family buys, or friends, that may be, but somebody must. But to-night I am too much occupied with the drawings of Lhermitte to go on writing about other things.

When I think of Millet or of Lhermitte, I find modern art as great as Michaelangelo and Rembrandt—ancient art is infinite, modern art infinite too—the ancient masters are *genii*—the modern ones are *genii* too. A person like Chenavard does not think so

perhaps. But I, for my part, am convinced that in this respect one can have faith in modern art.

The fact that I have a definite belief concerning art, makes me sure of what I want in my own work, and I shall try to reach it even at the risk of my own life.

Good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent.

424

Dear Theo, (Sept.)

I want to tell you that I have finished a few things which I should like to send you.

I have read the book by Bracquemond more than once, and have thought it over well. Though what he says about the colours is not new, though after all it comes to the same as the theories discovered by Delacroix, though what he says about drawing: modelling is drawing, drawing is modelling, is not new either, yet for these and other theories I have seldom read stronger expressions.

Well, I like the book enormously, and it has rather preoccupied me. The pictures I have for you, are a few still-lives, a basket with potatoes, fruit, a brass kettle, etc., which I made especially in relation to the modelling with different colours, and I should like Portier to see them. I will send them to you as soon as I have money, for it is the end of the month.

I am curious to see the Lhermitte, if there has been a new one this month. I ordered some colours from Schoenfeld in Dusseldorf, because I could not get the right ones here.

The reason why the colour of the "Potato-eaters" is not good, is partly at least, the fault of the paint. I was reminded of it because I painted a large still-life, in which I sought similar tones, and as I was not satisfied with it, because I again got the same things as before, I painted it anew. Judging from this experience it would have become much better with the mineral blue I have now, than with what I had before.

Good-bye, Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,

I should have let you know before that I received in good order your letter and enclosed fr. 150.

I have also received the Lhermitte of September, it is splendid. You write about the Poussins in the Louvre, I am very fond of Poussin. But how long—too long—is it since I saw those paintings. You cannot imagine what a longing I have to see pictures. I shall have to satisfy it anyhow. Just for the very reason that I hope to persist in trying to find buyers for my own work, I think it will be a good thing for me to take a trip now and then.

Longing most of all for Rembrandt and Frans Hals, I shall go this week for a day to the Museum in Amsterdam, with a friend of mine from Eindhoven, of whom I showed you some studies.

If I can make connections for my own work, I shall not fail to do so, and I firmly believe that with perseverance I shall win.

Speaking of my work, I had already written to you that I have been very busy painting still-life lately, and I like it immensely. I shall send you some.

I know, they are hard to sell, but it is deuced useful, and I shall continue to paint them this winter.

You will receive a big still-life of potatoes, in which I was trying to bring in *corps*, I mean, to express the material in such a way that they become heavy, solid lumps, which would hurt you if they were thrown at you, for instance.

Well you will see for yourself.

That affair with the priest did not worry me any further. But of course there will always remain God-fearing natives in the village, who will persist in suspecting me, for one thing is sure, that the priest would only too gladly throw the whole blame of that affair on me. However as I am quite innocent, the gossip from that side leaves me perfectly indifferent; as long as they don't hinder me in my painting, I don't take any notice of it whatever. With the peasants where the accident happened, where I often used to paint, I remained on good terms, and I am as welcome in their home as I used to be. I am now busy painting still-lives of my birds' nests, four of which are finished; I think some

people, who are good observers of nature, might like them, because of the colours of the moss, the dry leaves and the grasses.

I will write you again at the end of this week, after my trip to Amsterdam.

As next month I have again to pay the rent, I can hardly afford the expense. But it must be done. So you will soon hear again.

Yours,  
Vincent.

I firmly believe that my work will improve by my seeing more pictures, because when I see a picture I can analyse how it is done. As to Poussin he is a painter, and a thinker who always gives inspiration, in whose pictures all reality is at the same time symbolic. In the work of Millet, of Lhermitte, all reality is also at the same time symbolic. They are different from what is called realists.

426

Dear Theo,

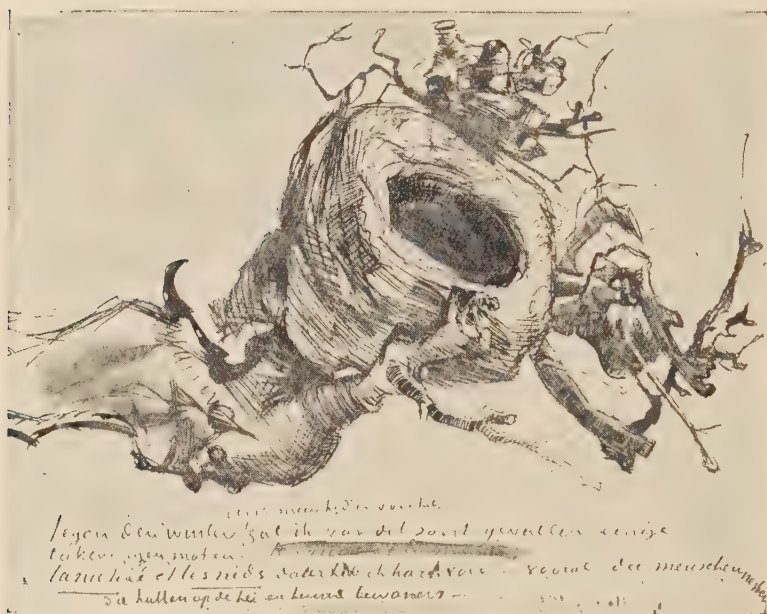
(Oct.)

I have been to Amsterdam this week. I had scarcely time to see anything but the museum. I was there three days, I went on Tuesday and returned on Thursday. The result is that I am *very* glad that I went, cost what may, and I made up my mind not to be so long again without seeing pictures.

For the sake of the expenses I had put this trip off and off like so many other things. But it is far better that I can no longer fancy this to be the right way. It is too important for my work, and when I look at the old masters, whose technic I understand now much better than before, then for the rest I need perhaps very little conversation.

I do not know whether you remember that to the left of the "Nightwatch," as *pendant* of "The Syndics" there is a picture (unknown to me till now) by Frans Hals and P. Codde, about twenty officers full length. Did you ever notice that??? that alone—that one picture is worth while the trip to Amsterdam—especially for a colourist. There is a figure on it, the figure of the flag-bearer,

quite in the left corner, right against the frame—that figure is from top to toe in grey, I shall call it pearl-grey—of a peculiar neutral tone, probably the result of orange and blue mixed in such a way that they neutralize each other—by varying that keynote, making it somewhat lighter here, somewhat darker there, the whole figure is as if it were painted with one same grey. But the leather boots are of a different material than the leggings, which differ



from the folds of the trousers, which differ from the waistcoat—expressing a different material, differing mutually in colour—but all one family of grey. But just wait a moment!

Now in that grey he brings blue and orange—and some white; the waistcoat has satin bows of a divine soft blue, sash and flag orange—a white collar.

Orange, blanje, blue, as the national colours were then—orange and blue, side by side, that most splendid gamut, against a background of a grey, cleverly mixed just by uniting those two, let me call them poles of electricity (speaking of colours though) so that they annihilate each other in a white against that grey. Further



we find in that picture—other orange gamuts against other blue, further the most beautiful blacks against the most beautiful whites; the heads—about twenty of them, sparkling with life and spirit, and a technic! a colour! the figures of all those people splendid and full size.

But that orange blanje blue fellow in the left corner . . . I seldom saw a more divinely beautiful figure. It is unique.

Delacroix would have raved about it—absolutely raved. I was literally nailed to the spot. Well you know “The Singer,” that laughing fellow—a bust in a greenish black with carmine, carmine too in the flesh colour.

You know the bust of the man in yellow, citron amorti, whose face by the opposition of tones, has become a dashing masterly bronze, purplish (violet?).

Bürger has written about Rembrandt’s “Jewish Bride,” just as he wrote about v. d. Meer, of Delft, as he wrote about “The Sower” by Millet, as he wrote about Frans Hals, with devotion, and surpassing himself. “The Syndics” is perfect, is the most beautiful Rembrandt; but “The Jewish Bride”—not ranked so high, what an intimate, what an infinitely sympathetic picture it is, painted *d’une main de feu*. You see, in “The Syndics,” Rembrandt is true to nature, though *even there* and always he soars aloft, in the very highest, the infinite, but Rembrandt could do more than that—if he had not to be *literally* true, as in a portrait, when he was free to *idealize* to be poët, that means Creator. That’s what he is in “The Jewish Bride.” How Delacroix would have understood that picture. What a noble sentiment, infinitely deep.

“Il faut être mort plusieurs fois pour peindre ainsi,” how true it is here. As to the pictures by Frans Hals—he always remains on *earth*—one can speak about them. Rembrandt is so deeply mysterious that he says things for which there are no words in any language. Rembrandt is truly called *magician* . . . that’s not an easy calling. I have packed several still-lives, which you will receive next week, together with two souvenirs from Amsterdam, which I caught in the flight, and also a few drawings. I shall also send you in a few days a book by de Goncourt: *Chérie*. De Goncourt is always beautiful and his way of working is so honest and he drudged on it so hard.

In Amsterdam I saw two pictures by Israël, “The Fisherman

of Zandvoort," and—one of his very latest, an old woman huddled together like a bundle of rags near the bedstead, in which the corpse of her husband is lying.

Both pictures are masterpieces I think. Let them jabber about technic as much as they like, in Pharisaical, hollow, hypocritical terms—the true painters are guided by that conscience that is called sentiment, their soul, their brains are not subject to the pencil, but the pencil to their brains. Besides the canvas is afraid of a real painter, and not a painter afraid of the canvas.

In Amsterdam I saw also pictures of to-day, Witkamp and others. Witkamp is one of the best, reminds one of Jules Breton, others whom I have in mind, but whom I shall not name, who always talk about what *they* call technic, I found them *weak in that very technic*.

You know all those cold grey tones, which they think are distinguished, but which are flat and uninteresting, childishly mixed. Nowadays they bring on the market colours purposely mixed with pure white, for the sake of the painters who paint in what they call a distinguished light gamut.

Just listen, *the technic*, the colouring, the modelling of "The Fisherman of Zandvoort," for instance, is in my opinion Delacroix-like and superb, and the cold flat greys of to-day are technically not worth much, but remain *paint*, and with Israël's one forgets the paint. But remember, I do not mean Jaap Maris, Willem Maris, Mauve, Neuhuys, who each in his peculiar gamut work in the right manner, Blommers too. But the school of those painters, their followers, Theo, I don't think they are worth much.

I have also seen the museum Fodor. "The Shepherd" by Decamps is really a masterpiece; do you remember the Meissonnier, a sketch of a death-bed? The Diaz?

Well Bosboom, Waldorp, Nuyen, Rochussen, the *original* painters of that period of forty years back, I always like to see them.

Rochussen possesses an *élan* like Gavarni.

The still-lifes which I am sending are studies for colour, I intend to make more of them; do not think this is useless. After a while they will get darker, but in a year, for instance, they will be better than now, when being dry to the core they will have got a solid varnish. If you put a great number of my studies, the old ones as well as the new ones, with some drawing-pins on a wall of your room

pell-mell, then I think you will see that there is relation between those studies, that the different colours harmonize.

Speaking of black—the more I see of those pictures in a cold childish gamut, the more I am glad that my studies are found too black.

Look at “The Fisherman of Zandvoort” and see with what colours it is painted, is it painted with red, with blue, with yellow, with black and some dirty white, with brown (everything well mixed and broken), or is it not? When Israël says that one must not paint black, he certainly never means what they now make of it, he means that there must be colour in the shadows, but that does not exclude a single gamut how low it may be, nor of course that of the blacks and browns and deep blues.

But what is the good of thinking about it; it is much better to think of Rembrandt, of Frans Hals, of Israël, than to think of that fashionable impotency.

I am writing you rather a long letter—though perhaps you may not believe what I say about the colours, and though you may find me perhaps pessimistic, when I say that much of what is called delicate grey is a very ugly grey, though you may find me pessimistic or worse, when I also disapprove of the smooth polishing of faces, hands and eyes, because the great masters all worked in quite a different way, perhaps by and by, your own *study* of art, which I am glad you thoroughly took up again, will change you too.

Now I have still a favour to ask, that acquaintance of mine in Eindhoven, who went with me to Amsterdam, bought at Uncle Cor's: Bürger's *Musées de la Hollande, Hoop et Rotterdam*, but they did not have the first volume, *Musées de la Haye et d'Amsterdam*. However we must have it, it is out of print, but you will be able to pick up one somewhere, and he will even pay fr. 10 for it, though of course rather less. I shall send you the money immediately, as it is for him and on that condition he has given me the order. So will you try to get it please?

If you find one, first read it through once more yourself, it is so beautiful.

I did not enter the store of Uncle Cor with him.

The small panels I painted in Amsterdam are done in a flying hurry. One even in the waiting-room of the station, when I was too early for the train, the other in the morning, before I went to

the museum at 10 o'clock. Yet I send them to you by way of tiles on which a few strokes have been dashed off.

As to the end of the month, lad, I am literally stripped, what's to be done? Can you not send fr. 20 more, or however little, it may be? Next month I have also to pay for colours, the first of November 25 guilders rent.

As to connections for my work, I spoke with somebody about it and whenever I shall go again I shall take some work with me. There is a general malaise, which makes it easy enough to find an occasion for exhibition. Let us paint much, if we want to have success that is necessary, just because times are slack we must work hard, then instead of finding all harbours closed for us, we will one day carry the broom on top.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

427

Dear Theo,

To-day I forwarded carriage paid a box marked V.4 containing the still-lives. The two sketches of Amsterdam are unfortunately somewhat damaged. They got wet on the way, then the panels got warped while drying and dust stuck on them, etc. But I sent them to show you that if in an hour's time I want to dash off an impression somewhere, I am learning to do so in the same way as others who analyse their impressions, and who account for what they see. That is a different thing from feeling that is to undergo impressions, there is perhaps a great difference between undergoing impressions and analysing them, that is to say, *taking them to pieces and putting them together again*. But it is pleasant work to dash off something in a rush.

What struck me most on seeing again the old Dutch pictures is that most of them *have been painted quickly*, that these great masters, such as a Frans Hals, a Rembrandt, a Ruysdael and so many others—dashed off a thing from the first stroke and did not retouch it so very much.

And please notice this too—if it was right, *they left it as it was*.

I have especially admired hands by Rembrandt and Hals, certain hands in "The Syndics," even in "The Jewish Bride," and in Frans Hals, hands that lived, but were not finished, in the sense they want it nowadays.

And heads too—eyes, nose, mouth done with a single stroke of the brush without any retouch whatever. Unger, Bracquemond have etched it well—just as it was painted and one can see in their etchings the way of painting.

Theo, how necessary it is in these days to look at the old Dutch pictures! and at the French painters, Corot, Millet, etc. The rest might perhaps quite well be missed, and lead others more astray than they think.

To paint in one rush, as much as possible in one rush. What joy to see such a Frans Hals, how different it is from those pictures—there are so many of them—where everything has carefully been smoothed down in the same way.

By chance I saw a Meissonnier in the museum Fodor on the same day that I saw old Dutch masters, Brouwer, Ostade, especially Terburg.

Well, Meissonnier does it, like they do, a very well-considered, well-calculated touch—but in one stroke and if possible at once correct.

I think it better to scrape off with the knife a part that is wrong, and to begin anew, than to make too many corrections.

I saw a sketch by Rubens and a sketch by Diaz almost at the same time; they were not alike, but what they have in common is the belief that colour expresses form, if well applied and in harmony. Diaz is indeed a painter to the very marrow—and he is conscientious to his finger-ends.

The Diaz in Fodor is but sketchy, but perhaps for that very reason, it was for me, who had not seen one for years, a great pleasure to see it again and it did very well, even if one had just seen the technic of the old masters.

I must refer once more to certain pictures of the present, that become more and more numerous.

About ten or fifteen years ago they began to speak of "clearness," of light. Originally this was right, it is a fact that beautiful things were produced by that system. But when this degenerates in an over-production of pictures that have the same light all over the



canvas, in all the four corners—I think they call it day-tone and local colour, is this right??? I think not. The Ruysdael of v.d. Hoop, the one with the mill, is it not full of air? Is there not enormously air and space in it? And yet the whole picture is in a much lower keynote than people would put it now, besides earth and sky form one whole, belong together.

Van Goyen, that Corot among the Dutch, I stood a long time before that superb picture in the Dupper collection, two oak trees on a dune in autumn, in the storm.

A sentiment, let me say as Jules Dupré or as *le Buisson*. But there is more common yellow ochre than white in the picture. There is Cuypp—a view of Dordrecht in v.d. Hoop's collection, it is quite reddish gold—there too are the ochres.

The picture by Frans Hals, you may call it what you like: *citron amorti* or *jaune chamois*, with what is it done? In the picture it seems very light, but just put white against it.

A great lesson taught by the old Dutch masters is I think the following: to consider drawing and colour to be one, what Bracquemond says too. And this—many painters do not do so, they draw with everything, except with a healthy colour. Oh, Theo, it is such a nuisance, it is such a bore to listen to a fellow like Haverman, when he speaks about “technic,” I do not mean Rappard, because though he too speaks in that way, luckily for him he paints better than he speaks.

I don't care at all to make friends among the painters' club, but I repeat—speaking of technic, there is a deal more of healthy, sound technic in Israëls, for instance in that very old picture, “The Fisherman of Zandvoort,” with its splendid chiaroscuro than in the technic of those who are always everywhere equally smooth, flat and distinguished in their frigid colour. That “Fisherman of Zandvoort” you may put it safely beside an old Delacroix—“La Barque du Dante,” it is of one and the same family.

Those are the things in which I believe, but every day I hate more and more those pictures which are light all over. It is a bad thing for me when they say that I have “no technic”; it is possible that as I make no acquaintances among the painters, this will blow over, it is true that on the contrary *those who talk most about technic* are in my eyes most weak in it!

I wrote you so already. But when I show in Holland

something of my work, I know beforehand what will be said, and by what kind of critics. Meanwhile I go quietly to the *old Dutch masters*, and to the pictures by Israëls, and to those who stand in direct connection with Israëls, what the modern painters do not do. They are rather straightway opposed to Israëls.

And I think I have noticed that Israëls himself, and Maris, Mauve, Neuhuys, too, look disapprovingly at a certain tendency, about which we are talking now. Mesdag, for instance, who was at first very *realistic* as you remember, becomes in his later pictures and drawings, deeper of tone and often somewhat more mysterious in short.

Witkamp has many good points, is rather like Jules Breton or Bastien Lepage, but Jules Breton is warm and he is *much too cold*. And that's a fault not easily remedied, to get some warmth in a thing it must be put in from the very beginning, otherwise one cannot get rid of the coldness.

That what they call clearness, is in many cases an ugly studio-tone of a cheerless city-studio. The dawn of the morning or the twilight of the evening does not seem to exist, there only seems to be midday, from 11 to 3, a very decent hour indeed, but—often insipid as a milksop.

But for all that, Theo—I am deuced hard up at present. Painting hard is very expensive, I am almost without a cent, and the end of the month is misery. The saying “l'argent est le nerf de la guerre” is alas also true of painting. In war, however, the result is nothing but misery and destruction, and in painting one sometimes sows, though the painter himself is not the man who reaps.

How are you, and how is business? I do not know if I am right, but judging from the show window, the store in Amsterdam did not look very flourishing, but oh, so quiet and respectable.

Indeed too much courage and enthusiasm are not the faults? of to-day. I have hardly spoken to anybody, but indirectly I sounded here and there, because I am curious to see what will be the results of the art trade and what will become of it, I don't think you are exactly overwhelmed by pictures—are you?

This winter I am going to study several things of great technical skill which I noticed in the old masters. I have seen much that is of use to me. But above all things—this, what is called *enlever*, that is what the old Dutch masters did famously.

That *enlever* in a few strokes of the brush, one does not want it to-day, but how excellent are the results and how masterly was this understood by many French painters, by Israël too.

In the museum I was thinking continually of Delacroix, why? Because standing before Hals, before Rembrandt, before Ruysdael and others, I was constantly reminded of the saying: “lorsque Delacroix peint, c’est comme le lion qui dévore le morceau.” That is how it ought to be, and oh, Theo, when I think of what I will call the technical club, as they call themselves, how dull it is. If at any time I come in contact with one of those gentlemen or meet one of them, you may be sure I shall play the fool, but *à la vireloque* with a *coup de dents* behind.

I hate it when things drag and go amiss.

And is it not a fatal thing, that forced finish everywhere (what they *call* finish) everywhere that same monotonous grey, instead of light and brown; colour—local colour—instead of tone, isn’t it deplorable and yet isn’t it so?

All these things I find wrong, because I think Israël for instance such a master, and because there are so many modern as well as old painters, whom one can admire.

I ought to have noticed before this that very probably I am boring you with this letter. But the fact is I didn’t think of it. For my part, I can tell you that I wish you would write me your impressions of things in the Louvre, or Luxembourg, or from anywhere else.

Writesoon if you can, and let me tell you that the end of the month is very hard. But I am glad to have been in Amsterdam, though it was at a moment when I could afford the expenses less than ever. The consequence is that about the New Year I shall be very hard up, but, in short, faint heart never won fair lady and for the sake of painting, I will put up with being always in difficulties, if it must be.

Good-bye, I hope you will get my parcel in good order. There is a book by de Goncourt about; Chardin, Boucher, Watteau, and Fragonard; I must read that; have you got it or one of your friends perhaps? I am afraid not, but you know perhaps if it is very important?

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

To-day I received your letter with the enclosure. I was very pleased with your letter, because I noticed a few things in it which I want to talk over. To begin at the beginning; what you write about a certain study, of a basket with apples, is very well observed, but does this observation come from yourself??? because I fancy, I should almost say *I am sure*, that you did *not* use to see that kind of thing: However this may be, here we are on the way to agree more about the colours.

Go deeper into *those* questions, for that will be of use to you and those are the things that Bürger and Manz and Silvestre knew.

Just to explain how that study has been painted—simply this: green and red are complimentary colours. Now there is in the apples, an in itself very vulgar red, further beside it some greenish things. But there are also one or two apples of another colour, of a certain pink which makes the whole thing right.

That pink is the broken colour acquired by mixing the above-mentioned red, and the above-mentioned green.

That's the reason why there is harmony between the colours.

Added to this is a second contrast, the background forms a contrast to the foreground, the one is a neutral colour, got by mixing blue with orange, the other, the same neutral colour simply changed by adding some yellow.

But I am awfully glad that you notice a combination of colour, be it through direct or indirect personal sentiment.

Further, that one of the studies seemed to you a variation on the theme brown-grey, well that certainly is the case, but all three of the potato studies are so, with this difference, that one is a study in *terre de Sienne*, the second in *terre de Sienne brûlée*, the third in yellow ochre and red ochre.

The latter—that is the largest one—is in my opinion the best— notwithstanding the dull black background which I left on purpose dull because the ochres are also in transparent colours by nature. As to that study, the largest one of the potatoes, it is made by

changing, by breaking, those intransparent ochres by a transparent blue. As red ochre with yellow ochre gives orange, their combination with blue is more neutral, and against that neutralized colour, they become either more red or more yellow.

The highest light in that whole picture is simply some pure yellow ochre. The reason why this dull yellow stands out so is because it is put in a wide field of, be it neutral, violet; because, . . . red ochre with blue gives violet tones.

Well, the birds' nests have also been painted on purpose against a black background, because I openly want to express in these studies, that the objects do not appear in their natural surroundings, but against a conventional background. A *living* nest in nature is quite different, one hardly sees the nest itself, one sees the birds.

But when one wants to paint nests from one's *collection of nests*, one cannot express strongly enough the fact that the background and the surroundings in nature are quite different, I straightway painted the background black. But it is a fact that in a still-life a coloured background can be beautiful—in Amsterdam I saw still-lives by Miss Vos that were *excellent*, much more beautiful than those by Blaise Desgoffe<sup>1</sup>—really like van Beyeren. I could not help thinking that those simple still-lives of hers had far more artistic value than many pretentious pictures of other Amsterdam painters.

They struck me as very well done. Especially one with a golden vase, a few empty oyster shells, a broken cocoʒ-nut shell and a crust of bread. I will send you the book by Blanc; I hope soon to get *L'Art au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*; I am especially longing to hear something from de Goncourt about Chardin. The Rembrandt of Lacaze really also is in the sentiment of Rembrandt's last period; it is about twelve years ago since I saw it, but I still remember it, because it struck me, just like that head by Fabritius in Rotterdam. If I remember well, that nude woman in the Collection Lacaze is also very beautiful, also of a later period. The fragment, Rembrandt's Anatomical lesson, yes I was also absolutely staggered by it. Do you remember those flesh tones—it is—*de la terre*—especially the feet.

You know, the flesh tones of Frans Hals are also muddy, used

<sup>1</sup> A French painter of still-life in the middle of the 19th century.



here in the signification you know. Often at least. Sometimes, I almost dare to say always, there also is a relation of contrast between the tone of the costume and the tone of the face.

Red and green are opposites; *The Singer* (Dupper collection), who has tones of carmine in the flesh colour, has tones of green in his black sleeves, and bows on those sleeves *of another red* than that carmine. The orange blanje blue fellow, about whom I wrote, has a relatively neutral complexion, muddy-pink, violetish, in contrast with his Frans Hals yellow leather suit.

The *yellow* fellow, citron amorti, decidedly has dull violet in his face. Well—the darker the costume, the lighter the face is sometimes—not accidentally—at least his portrait and that of his wife in the garden has *two* dark violets (blue-violet and reddish violet) and a plain black (yellow-black?). I repeat reddish violet and blue-violet, black and black, as it were the three most gloomy things; well, the faces are *very* fair, *extremely* fair, even for Hals.

Well, Frans Hals is a colourist *amongst the colourists*, a colourist like Veronese, like Rubens, like Delacroix, like Velasquez.

Of Millet, Rembrandt and, for instance, Israëls it has truly been said that they are rather harmonists than colourists.

But tell me, *black* and *white*, may they be used or not, are they forbidden fruit?

I don't think so, Frans Hals even has twenty-seven blacks. White, but you know yourself, what characteristic pictures some modern colourists make of white on white. What is the meaning of that word: *one may not*? Delacroix called them *rests*, used them as such. You must not have a prejudice against them, for if only used in their place, and in harmony with the rest, one may of course use every tone.

I can tell you that the things of Apol, for instance, white on white, are often very well done.

His sunset in the wood of the Hague, for instance, which is in Amsterdam. That thing is jolly good, indeed.

No—black and white, they have their reason and signification, and when one tries to suppress them, it turns out wrong; to consider both as *neutral*, is certainly the most logical, white: the highest combination of the lightest red, blue, yellow—black: the highest combination of the darkest red, blue, yellow—against that theory I have nothing to say, I find it perfectly true. Well *light* and *brown*,

the *tone* in its *value* stands in direct relation to that 4th gamma of *white to black*. For where one finds:

Gamma	1	from	yellow	to	violet,
„	2	„	red	„	green,
„	3	„	blue	„	orange,
Sum—					
a fourth gamma		from	white	to	black
(that of the neutral tones, that of red+blue+yellow).			(red+blue+yellow, extreme light).		(red+blue+yellow, deepest black).

That is how I understand the blacks and the whites.

When I mix red with green to a red-green or green-red, by mixing it with white, I then get pink-green or green-pink. And if you like, by adding black, I get brown-green or green-brown. Is not that clear? When I mix yellow with violet to a violet-yellow or yellow-violet, in other terms a neutralized yellow or a neutralized violet, by adding white and black, I get greys.

Well, *greys* and *browns*, there is especially then question of them, when one makes colours *lighter* or *darker*, whatever may be their nature and their alloyage of red, yellow or blue.

To speak about light and dark greys and browns, is quite correct, I think. But how beautiful is what Silvestre says about Delacroix—that he put on his pallet a casual tone, *une nuance innommable violacée*, that he put that one tone down somewhere, *either for highest light or for deepest shadow*, but that he made of this *drab* something which either sparkled as light or was gloomily silent as deep shadow.

So I have heard of an experiment with a sheet of neutral coloured paper—which became greenish against a red background, reddish on a green one, bluish on orange, orange on blue, yellowish on violet, and violetish on yellow.

Just listen, suppose one wants such a *muddy tone* or *drab colour* to become *light* in the picture, like Delacroix said about Veronèse, that he could paint with a colour like drab, a blonde nude woman, so that she comes out fair and blonde in the picture—then the question arises—how is this possible, unless by contrast of great forces in bluish blacks or violets, or reddish browns?

You—who are looking to find dark shadows somewhere, and think that when the shadows are dark, ay, black, that it is all wrong then, don't you? I don't think so. For, then, for instance, the

“Dante” of Delacroix, for instance, the “Fisherman of Zandvoort,” would be wrong. For they indeed have their greatest strength in bluish or violet-blacks. Rembrandt and Hals, did not they use black? and Velasquez???

Not only one, but twenty-seven blacks, I assure you. So as to “one must not use black,” are you quite sure yourself that you know what you mean by it? and do you know, what you want with it? Really, think it over well, for you might come to the conclusion—I think this very probable—that you have learned and understood that question of tones quite wrongly, or rather have learned it *vaguely* and understood it *vaguely*. Many people do so, most of them do. But Delacroix and others of his time will teach you better in the long run. Tell me—have you noticed that those studies of mine that have black backgrounds have their *highest light* put in a *low keynote* ???

And as I thus put my study in a *lower keynote* than nature, I yet keep the harmony of tones, because I become darker, not only in my shadows, but *also* in the same degree in *my lights*.

I just painted my studies as a kind of gymnastics, to rise and fall in tone, so—don’t forget that I painted my white and grey moss literally with a drab colour, and yet it seems light in the study.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

These things concerning complimentary colours, simultaneous contrast, and the neutralizing of complimentaries, this question is the first and principal, the second is the mutual influence of two *kindred colours*, for instance, carmine on a vermilion, a pink-violet on a blue-violet. The third question is a light blue against the same dark blue, a pink against a brown-red, a yellow citron against a yellow chamoix, etc. But the first question is the most important.

If you come across some good book on theories of colour, mind you send it me, for I too am far from knowing everything about it, and am daily searching further.

Dear Theo,

I read your letter about black with great pleasure, and it convinces me that you have no prejudice against black.

Your description of Manet's study "*Le Toréador Mort*," was well analysed. And the whole letter proves the same, what your sketch of Paris at the time suggested to me, that if you put yourself to it, you can paint a thing in words.

It is a fact that by studying the laws of the colours, one can come from instinctive belief in the great masters, to the analysis of why one admires—what one admires—and that indeed is necessary in the present days, when one realizes how terribly arbitrary and superficially people criticize.

You must just let me keep my pessimism about the art trade in the present days, for it does *not* at all include discouragement. This is my way of reasoning. Supposing I am right, in considering that curious haggling about prices of pictures, more and more like the bulb trade. I repeat, supposing that like the bulb trade at the end of the last century, so the art trade with other branches of speculation at the end of this century, will disappear as they came, namely, rather quickly. The bulb trade may disappear—the *flower-growing* remains. And I for myself am contented, for better or for worse, to be a small gardener, who loves his plants.

Just now my pallet is thawing and the frigidness of the first beginning has disappeared.

It is true, I often blunder still when I undertake a thing, but the colours follow of their own accord, and taking one colour as starting-point, I have clearly before my mind, what must follow, and how to get life into it.

Jules Dupré is in landscape rather like Delacroix, for what enormous variety of mood does he express in symphonies of colour.

Now a marine, with the most delicate blue-greens and broken blue and all kinds of pearly tones, then again an autumn landscape, with a foliage of deep wine-red to vivid green, from bright orange to dark havana, with again other colours in the sky, in greys, lilacs, blues, whites, again forming a contrast with the yellow leaves.

Then again a sunset in black, in violet, in fiery red.

Then again, more fantastical, as I once saw a corner of a garden by him, which I never forgot: black in the shadow, white in the sun, vivid green, a fiery red and then still a dark blue, a bitumous greenish brown, and a light brown-yellow. Colours indeed that have something to say for themselves.

I have always been very fond of Jules Dupré, and he will become still more appreciated than he is. For he is a real colourist, always interesting, and so powerful and dramatic.

Yes, he is indeed a brother of Delacroix.

As I told you, I think your letter about black very good, and what you say about the not painting of local colour, is also quite correct. But it doesn't satisfy me. In my opinion there is much more behind that not painting the local colour.

"Les vrais peintres sont ceux qui ne font pas la couleur locale"—that was what Blanc and Delacroix discussed once.

May I not boldly understand by it that a painter had better start from the colours on his pallet than from the colours in nature? I mean, when one wants to paint, for instance, a head, and sharply observes the reality one has before one, then one may think: that head is a harmony of red-brown, violet, yellow, all of them broken—I will put a violet and a yellow and a red-brown on my pallet and these will break each other.

I retain from nature a certain sequence and a certain correctness in placing the tones, I study nature, so as not to do foolish things, to remain reasonable however, I don't mind so much, whether my colour is exactly the same, as long as it looks beautiful on my canvas, as beautiful as it looks in nature.

Far more true is a portrait by Courbet, manly, free, painted in all kinds of beautiful deep tones of red-brown, of gold, of colder violet in the shadow with black as *repoussoir*, with a little bit of tinted white linen, as a repose to the eye—finer than a portrait of whomever you like, who has imitated the colour of the face with horrible *preciseness*.

A man's head or a woman's head, well contemplated and at leisure, is divinely beautiful, isn't it. Well, that *general harmony* of tones in nature, one loses it by painfully exact imitation, one keeps it by re-creating in a *similar* colour gamma, but may be, not exactly or far from exactly like the model.

Always and intelligently to make use of the beautiful tones which



the colours form of their own accord, when one breaks them on the pallet, I repeat—to start from one's pallet from one's knowledge of harmony of colours, is quite different to following nature mechanically and severely.

Here is another example: suppose I have to paint an autumn landscape, trees with yellow leaves. All right—when I conceive it as a symphony in yellow, what does it matter, whether the fundamental colour of yellow is the same or not as that of the leaves. It matters *very little*.

*Much, everything* depends on my perception of the infinite variety of tones of one *same family*.

Do you call this a dangerous inclination towards romanticism, an infidelity to “realism,” a “peindre de chic,” a caring more for the pallet of the colourist than for nature, well, *que soit*. Delacroix, Millet, Corot, Dupré, Daubigny, Breton, thirty names more, are they not the heart of the art of painting of this century, and are they not all rooted in romanticism, though they *surpassed* romanticism?

Romance and romanticism are of our time, and painters must have imagination and sentiment. Luckily realism and naturalism are not free from it. Zola creates, but does not hold up a mirror to things, he creates *wonderfully*, but *creates, poetises*, that is why it is so beautiful. This much for naturalism and realism, which yet stand in connection to romanticism.

And I repeat that I am touched when I see a picture of about the years '30-'48, a Paul Huet, and old Israël, like the “Fisherman of Zandvoort,” a Cabat, an Isabey.

But I find so much truth in that saying: “ne pas peindre le ton local,” that I by far prefer a picture in a lower keynote than nature to one which is exactly like nature.

Rather a water-colour that is somewhat vague and unfinished than one which is worked up to simulate reality.

That saying: “ne pas peindre le ton local,” has a broad meaning, and it leaves the painter free to seek for colours which form a whole and harmonize, which stands out the more in contrast to another gamut.

What do I care whether the portrait of an honourable citizen tells me exactly the water and milk bluish, insipid colour of that pious man's face—which I had never noticed. But the citizens

of the small town, where the above-mentioned individual has rendered himself so meritorious that he thought himself obliged to impress his physiognomy on his descendants, are highly edified by the correct exactness. *Colour expresses something by itself*, one cannot do without this, one must use it, that which is beautiful, really beautiful—is also correct; when Veronèse had painted the portraits of his beau-monde in the “Noces de Cana,” he had spent on it all the richness of his pallet in sombre violets, in splendid golden tones.

Then—he thought still of a faint azure and pearly-white—which does not appear in the foreground. He thunders it on in the background—and it was right, involuntarily it changes into the surroundings of marble palaces and sky, which characteristically complete the range of figures.

So beautiful is that background that it arose spontaneously from a calculation of colours.

Am I wrong in this?

Is it not painted *differently* than somebody would do it who had thought at the same time of the palace *and* of the figures as one whole?

All that architecture and sky is conventional, and subject to the figures, it is calculated to make the figures stand out beautifully.

Surely *that is* real painting, and the result is more beautiful than the exact imitation of the things themselves. To think of one thing and to let the surroundings belong to it and follow from it.

To study from nature, to wrestle with reality—I don’t want to do away with it, for years and years I myself have done so, almost fruitlessly and with all kinds of sad results.

I should not like to have missed that *error*.

I mean that it would be foolish and stupid to always go on in that same way, but *not* that all my pains should be absolutely lost.

“On commence par tuer, on finit par guérir,” is a doctor’s saying. One starts with a hopeless struggle to follow nature, and everything goes wrong, one ends by calmly creating from one’s pallet, and nature agrees with it, and follows. But these two contrasts do not exist separately. The drudging, though it may seem in vain, gives an intimacy with nature, a sounder knowledge of the things. And a beautiful saying by Doré (who sometimes is so clever!) is: *je me souviens*. Though I believe that the best pictures are relatively painted by heart, yet I *cannot* separate from it that one never

can study and plod too much from nature. The greatest, most powerful imaginations have at the same time made things directly from nature which strike one dumb.

In answer to your description of the study by Manet, I send you a still-life of an open—so a broken white—Bible bound in leather, against a black background, with yellow-brown foreground, with a touch of citron yellow.

I painted that in *one rush*, on one day.

This to show you that when I say that I have perhaps not plodded quite in vain, I dare say this, because at present it comes quite easily to me to paint a given subject unhesitatingly, whatever its form or colour may be. Recently I painted a few studies out of doors, of autumn landscape. I shall write again soon, and send this letter in haste to tell you that I was quite pleased with what you say about black.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(4th November '85.)

I just received your letter and the enclosure, for which many thanks. I want to answer you at once that I often met with sayings of Diderot, and that I too think that he fits well in the frame of his time. It is the same with him as with Voltaire himself, when one reads a letter of those men, even on the most commonplace things, or about *nothing*, there is a brightness and a sparkling spirit in them which charm. Let us not forget that they were the men who made the Revolution, and that it is the work of a genius to dominate one's time, and to make the minds that are thoughtless and passive strive in one direction and after one aim. So I have all respect for them. Shortly you will receive two studies of the autumn leaves, one in yellow—*poplars*, the other in orange—*oaks*.

I am absolutely preoccupied by the laws of colours. If only they had taught them us in our youth!

But it is the fate of most people that by a kind of fatality one has to seek a long time for light. For, that the laws of colour which

Delacroix was the first to regulate and to bring to light in their connection and completeness for the general use, like Newton did for gravitation, and like Stephenson did for steam—that those laws of colours are a ray of light—is perfectly sure.

I have made another autumn study of the pond in the garden at home. There decidedly is a picture in that spot. Last year already I tried to get at it.

The one I made now is but a stiff composition—to the right two trees—orange and yellow, in the centre two bushes of grey-green, to the left two trees of brownish yellow. In front of them the black pond—a foreground of withered grass. The background—a glimpse over the hedge on a very vivid green. A sky of slate-grey and dark blue to harmonize with this in strength.

I am sure they will find it too black and too dark, but the time of making dark studies is always too short.

I enclose the book of Ch. Blanc in the box with the studies, also a Bible which mother gave me for you, of which I painted a still-life.

Don't let it trouble you when I just leave the brush strokes in my studies, as I put them on, with smaller or larger clods of paint. That does not matter at all, if one leaves them for a year (or half a year is enough), and then scrapes them off quickly with a razor, one gets a much more solid colour than would be the case after painting flimsily. For the sake of the conservation and preserving the colours of a picture, it is necessary that especially the light parts are painted solidly. And this scraping off has been done by the old masters as well as by the French painters of to-day. I believe that glais of a transparent colour often get quite dark and disappear in time, if they are applied before the picture in its preparation is thoroughly dry, but applied *later*, they certainly will keep. You yourself made the observation that my studies in the studio became rather better than worse in colour by time. I think this comes from putting the paint on solidly, and not using oil. When it is a year old, the little oil which the paint always contains has evaporated, and there remains the healthy solid part. This question—that of painting so that it keeps well—is rather important I think; it is a pity that some durable colours like cobalt are so expensive.

I do not know what to think of the chromates and dark carmines, but I can quite understand, that especially the American sunsets, you

know those kinds of paintings, which are obtained by glais of chromates, last an exceedingly short time. Daubigny and Dupré, on the contrary, will keep. Isn't it curious that that v.d. Meer of Delft in the Hague has kept colour so splendidly, with that whole series of brisk tones of red, green, grey, brown, blue, black, yellow, white?

Haverman's picture in Amsterdam, which I suppose you remember (as not good), is badly painted, terribly badly, with a view to time I fear. I just mention this, because he especially is so much admired for *his technic*. But it is painted, as well I should say as for instance, Ary Scheffer painted, or like the technic of Delaroche—and lovers of healthy vigorous work have always had some objections against those two. I noticed in Fodor how those pictures that are polished smooth with oil crack terribly. Yet Silvestre says that Delacroix imbued his pictures with oil "*les baignait d'huile*," but I suppose that it was work strongly *empâté*, first treated *en pleine pâte*, then left for a year, and then afterwards Delacroix will have drenched those pictures with oil, after they were dry to the core. Then it can do no harm.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

Has there been no Lhermitte this month? I am longing for de Goncourt.

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Dear Theo,

Yesterday evening I received the book of de Goncourt. I began to read it at once, and though of course I shall read it over again quietly, I had this morning already a general view of the whole—I had been longing for it so much. I cannot find that he praises Boucher too much.

If I knew nothing of Boucher but the contrast of those three things, a rich blue (sky), a bronze (man's figure), and a mother-of-pearl white (woman's figure)—especially together with that anecdote of "La Duchesse d'Orléans," I would admit that he is a



*personality* in the world of painters. Besides, he doesn't praise him too much, because he certainly also calls him *canaille*, in the way in which one can call *canaille* the pictures by Bouguereau, Perrault, etc., without doing an injustice to the honest fellows. Because they miss something pathetic and intimate, don't they? In my opinion he does not praise Boucher too much, because I do not for a single moment fear de Goncourt would deny the superiority of, for instance, Rubens. Rubens who was even more productive than Boucher, not less than he, but still more, the painter of nude women.

Which very often in Rubens does not prevent the pathos and intimacy which I mean, especially in those portraits of his wives, in which he is himself then, or surpasses himself.

But *Chardin* !

I have often longed to know something about the *man* (Watteau was just as I expected).

*Tiers état*, Corot-like, as to *bonhomie*—with more sorrow and adversity in his life.

It is a splendid book. Latour-witty and Voltaire-like.

Pastel is a process which I would like to know. I shall certainly try some day. If one can *paint* a head, one must be able to learn it in a few hours.

I immensely enjoyed what he says about the technic of Chardin. I am more and more convinced that the true painters did not finish their things in the way which is but too often used, namely, correct when one scrutinizes it closely.

The best pictures, and, from a technical point of view, the most complete, seen from near by, are but patches of colour next to each other, and only make an effect at a certain distance.

That is what Rembrandt stuck to, notwithstanding all the trouble it caused him (the honest citizens preferred by far v.d. Helst, because his work can also be looked at from near by).

In that respect Chardin is as great as Rembrandt. Israël is the same, and I for my part think Israël always admirable, especially in his technic. It would be too good, if everybody knew this, and thought likewise, as *Bonnemort* would say.

But to work like that, one must be somewhat of a magician, to learn which costs a great deal, and the gloomy sarcastic saying of Michaelangelo: "*ma manière est destinée à faire de grands*

sots"—is also true of the colourists who dare to dash off their colours, this neither can be imitated by cowards and weaklings.

I think that I am making progress with my work. Last night something happened to me which I will tell you as minutely as I can. You know those three pollard oaks at the bottom of the garden at home; I have plodded on them for the fourth time. I had been at them three days with a canvas of the size of, for instance, that cottage, and the peasant churchyard which you have.

The difficulty was the tufts of havana leaves, to model them and give them the form, the colour, the tone. Then in the evening I took it to that acquaintance of mine in Eindhoven, who has rather a stylish drawing-room, where we put it on the wall (grey paper, furniture black with gold). Well, never before was I so convinced that I shall make things that do well, that I shall succeed in calculating my colours, so that I have it in my power to make effect. This was havana, soft green and white (grey), even *pure* white, direct from the tube (you see that I, for my part, though I speak about black, have no prejudice against the other extreme, the utmost extreme even).

Now, though that man has money, though he took a fancy to it, I felt such a glow of courage, when I saw that it was good, that as it hung there, it raised an atmosphere, by the soft melancholy harmony of that combination of colours *that I could not sell it*.

But as he had a fancy for it, I gave it him, and he accepted it just as I had intended, without many words, namely, little more than: "the thing is damned good."

I don't think so yet myself. First I must see a little more of Chardin, Rembrandt, old Dutch and French painters, and think it over well—because I want to make it more elaborate with less paint than I used, for instance, in this thing.

Now as to that acquaintance of mine and his opinion about pictures; when someone with a clear intelligent head paints still-life and works out of doors daily, if only for a year, he need not therefore be an art critic, neither does he yet feel himself to be a painter, but for all that he observes more originally than many others.

Besides, his character is not just everybody's, for instance, originally he was intended to become a priest, at a certain moment he flatly refused this, *and won his point*, in which not exactly every

one in Brabant succeeds. And there is something broad and loyal about him.

This something Zola once pointed out, when in a conversation between Mouret and his schoolfellow, he lets Mouret become serious, and say that it has cost him a great deal to free himself from that time and its influence, but that he wanted to live and that he *lives*. Many who undertake to change fall back, don't come any further than a certain insipid methodism, because they don't take their measures sharply enough. But it is not the case with him, he is a *man of importance* in his little world.

Do you know that de Goncourts have made etchings and drawings? You must not think me unpractical when I persist in animating you either to drawing or to painting. Neither would you be a failure. If you just put yourself to it, the result would not be unsatisfactory either. And especially as an *art dealer*, especially as *art critic*, it would give you ascendancy over many others. An ascendancy which one really needs. I refer once more to that acquaintance of mine; it is exactly a year ago that I saw him for the first time, when I made that large sketch of a watermill which you perhaps know (its colour is ripening well). Here follows a description of a study of that acquaintance of mine—some roofs, backs of houses, factory chimneys, dark against an evening sky.

That evening sky blue, changing at the horizon into a glow between clouds of smoky colour, with orange, or rather ruddy reflections. The masses of houses, dark but yet of a warm stone colour, a silhouette that has something gloomy and threatening.

The foreground, a vague plot in the dusk, black sand, faded grass, a bit of garden on which a few dark melancholy apple trunks, with here and there a tuft of yellow autumn leaves. He makes that absolutely of his own accord, but isn't it a good conception, a real *impression*, well felt, but one doesn't become a *painter* in one year, neither is it necessary.

But already there is one good thing among the lot, and one feels hopeful, instead of feeling helpless before a wall.

I do not know how I shall fare in the future. At present when I read of that splendid devil, that famous Latour, *by God*, how real it is, and how well that fellow, except for his enormous passion for money, has grasped life and painting.

I have just recently seen Frans Hals. Well you know how

enthusiastic I was about it, how I immediately wrote you a long letter about the painting in one stroke. Now what similarity is there between the ideas of Latour, for instance, and Frans Hals, when they express life with pastel which one might almost blow away. I don't know what I shall do, and how I shall fare, but I hope not to forget the lessons which I am thus learning lately: *in one stroke*—but with absolute complete exertion of all one's spirit and attention.

At present—I like nothing better than to work with the brush, to draw with it too—instead of making a sketch in charcoal.

When I ask myself how the old Dutch masters worked, I find relatively so few real drawings. And how wonderfully they draw. But—I think in most cases they began, continued and finished with their brush.

They did not *fill in*.

A van Goyen, for instance—I just saw that one by him in the Dupper collection, an oak tree on a dune in the storm, and the Cuyt: view of Dordrecht.

An astonishing technic, but done with nothing and quite naturally—clear of paint, and—apparently—quite simple.

But either in figure or in landscape, how the painters always did try to convince people that the picture is something different than nature in a mirror, different than imitation, re-creation.

I should like to tell you a great deal more, especially about what Chardin made me think about colour, and the not painting the local colour. I think it splendid.

“Comment surprendre—comment dire de quoi est faite cette bouche démeublée, qui a d'infinies délicatesses.

Cela n'est fait que de quelques traînées de *jaune* et de quelques balayures de *bleu!!!*”

When I read this I thought of v.d. Meer of Delft, his town view at the Hague, if one sees that close by, it is *incredible*, and painted with quite different colours than one would suspect at a few steps' distance.

Good-bye, I had to tell you at once how fine I think the book of de Goncourt.

Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,<sup>1</sup>

(November.)

.....  
 .....  
 This month I had to pay my rent, and at the same time I gave notice to leave my studio towards May. Its drawback is as you know that I am greatly handicapped by the neighbours, and I notice that people are still afraid of the priest, though perhaps he wouldn't meddle any further. But as there has once been trouble, the best thing is a radical change.

The last thing I painted is rather a big thing of an old mill on the barren heath, a dark silhouette against an evening sky. . . .

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

In the book of de Goncourt I found marked by you the following sentence in the article about Chardin. After having spoken about the bad financial conditions of painters, he says: "Que faire, que devenir? Il faut se jeter dans une condition subalterne ou mourir de faim. On prend le premier parti," so he continues, except a few *martyrs*, the rest become fencing master, soldier or actor. After all, this has remained true, up till now. As you had marked the above, I thought it possible, especially as I had just mentioned to you that I am going to give up my present studio, you might want to know what I intend to do further. The present days are not quite exactly like those of Chardin's, and there are a few things which at present can hardly be argued away. The number of painters is much larger.

Now it always makes a fatal impression on the public when the painter "takes up a by-job." I don't feel myself above this at all, but I should say: Go on painting, just make a hundred, and if that is not enough, two hundred studies, and see if this doesn't help you more than the "by-job."

<sup>1</sup> Part of this letter is missing.



To accustom oneself to poverty, to see how a soldier or a labourer lives and thrives in wind and weather, with the ordinary people's fare and dwelling, is just as practical as earning a few guilders more a week.

After all, one is not in the world for one's own comfort, and one does not need to be better off than one's neighbour.

To be a little better off helps so little after all. Anyhow, we cannot prevent the days of our youth slipping from us. If *that* were possible! But the real thing that makes happy, materially happy: to be young, and to remain so a long time—does not exist here—that does not even exist in Arabia or Italy, though *there* it is better than here.

And I for my part think that one has the greatest chance of remaining strong and renewing oneself under the *tiers état* of the present day. Well, so I say that I try to find it in painting without by-thought. But I shall do well to keep my eye on portrait painting if I want to earn something. I know it is difficult to satisfy people about the "likeness," and I do not dare to say beforehand that I feel sure of myself on that point. But I don't think it quite impossible, for the people here will not be much different from people elsewhere. Now the peasants here and the people from the village don't make mistakes and straightway say, *contradicting me even when I say they are wrong*: this is Reinier de Greef, that is Toen de Groot and that is Dien v.d. Beek, etc. And they even sometimes recognize a figure seen from behind. In the city the honest citizens, and certainly not less the cocottes, attach great importance to portraits. And Millet has discovered that *sea captains* even "respect" somebody who knows how to make them (probably these portraits are destined for their mistresses ashore). This has not been exploited yet. Do you remember this in Sensier? I always remembered it, how at Hâvre Millet kept himself afloat in this way.

Now I certainly intend to go to Antwerp, it is impossible for me to tell beforehand how or when.

I found out six addresses of art dealers, so I shall take some things with me, and further, I intend as soon as I get there—to paint a few views of the city—rather large size—and to exhibit them at once.

Thus concentrating everything on the work there, and going there being poor, I have nothing to lose in any case.

As to the neighbourhood here, I know the country and the people too well, and love them too much to know for sure that I will quite leave them for good. I shall try to rent a room where I can put my things, and am safe then, in case I want to leave Antwerp for a time, or if I might get homesick for the country.

As to that "by-job," from the very beginning, Tersteeg, for instance, had bothered me about it. And that was *nonsense*, whatever Tersteeg may say. Those who speak about it most are, however, not able to decide what it must be. And as to that, to make my case quite clear, if I should take up a "by-job," the only thing would be that if I knew dealers or painters, I should try to do something with pictures, for instance, by going to England for them, etc.

Such things of course, which are immediately connected with painting, make an exception, but otherwise, as a rule a painter must only be a painter.

And then, don't forget that I am not a born hypochondriac. The general nickname I have in this neighbourhood is: "t schildermenneke,"<sup>1</sup> and it is not without a certain dose of malice that I go yonder.

Now I have also thought of Drenthe, but it is more difficult to carry out. That, however, would be a good thing, in case my painting of rural life might please in Antwerp.

When the things from here might sooner or later have success, I would go on with them and vary them with the same kind of things from Drenthe.

But the question is that I can only do one thing at the time, that when I am busy painting peasants, I cannot occupy myself with business in town. It is now just the moment to break out for a bit, as I have had trouble with the model, and in any case I shall move out.

In this studio just next to the priest and the sexton, that trouble would never end, that is clear, so I am going to change this. But then it does not make an *absolute* impression on the people, and by renting another room and taking no notice of it for a few months, the intrigue will lose most of its power.

Now wouldn't it be the best thing, if I could spend the next two months, December and January, in Antwerp?

<sup>1</sup> The little painter.

In Amsterdam I stayed for 50 cents in a People's hostel. I would do the same yonder, or still better, I should like to make an arrangement with some painter to work in his studio. Another reason is that it is not absolutely improbable I shall find an opportunity somewhere to paint after the nude. At the academy they would not want me, nor would I want to go there—but—from a sculptor, for instance (there surely must be a few living there), one might perhaps get some sympathy. Of course with money one can get as many models as one likes, but without it, it is a difficult question. But there will certainly be some people there who take models for the nude, and with whom one might make an arrangement as to the expenses. I need it for many reasons. While I am writing this, I receive your letter.

You see that I wanted to fix my going to Antwerp at about the same time as mother's trip, which will be over about February, between then and their definite moving, I shall either be back in Nuenen or if I were kept there for some reason or other, I should always be ready to come back at once if necessary.

This letter must go, but I shall write you again in a few days.  
Good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent.

Write me soon what you think of my going to Antwerp. I don't suppose there will be any objection.

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Dear Theo,

.....  
I must say I am longing for Antwerp now. Probably the first thing I shall do there will be to go and see the pictures of Leys in his *dining-hall*, if it is open to the public. You know that "Walk on the Ramparts," and those which Bracquemont etched: "The Table" and "The Servant Maid."

I fancy it will be beautiful there this winter, especially the docks with snow.

Of course I shall take a few pictures with me, and they will be

those which I otherwise would have sent to you one of these days.

A big mill on the heath in the evening, and a view on the village behind a row of poplars with yellow leaves, a still-life, and a number of drawings of the figure.

At present I am rather in a fix with my work here. It is freezing hard, so work out of doors is impossible. It is better not to take models at all, as long as I live in this house, at least not before I come back. Then I save my paint and canvas so as to have ammunition out there. *So the sooner I can go the better.*

The other day I had a letter from Leurs about my pictures. He wrote that Tersteeg and Wisselingh had seen them, but did not care for them.

All the same I maintain that I shall bring people to other ideas although Tersteeg and Wisselingh may be indifferent. I have just read a few books in the style of the *Souvenirs of Gigoux*, which my friend at Eindhoven had ordered, and in which I found heaps of interesting things about the men of that period, beginning with Paul Huet. And which encourage me that I have not attacked nature from the wrong side, nor the technic of painting, though I gladly admit that I shall and must still change.

As to the heads which I sent you, there must be some good ones amongst them. I am almost sure of it. So let us go quietly on. I don't think this winter will be tedious. Of course it will especially be a question of hard work.

But there is something curious in the very feeling that one has to enter the fight. I am taking a good supply with me of that paint, which I can here get rubbed myself, but it will certainly be a good thing if I can get some paints yonder of a better quality.

I am also taking along at least forty small stretchers, of the size of those study heads which you have. And drawing material and paper, so that whatever happens I shall always have something to do.

As I have worked absolutely alone for years, I imagine that though I want to, and can learn from others, and even copy technical things, I shall always see through my own eyes, and render things originally. However, it is quite certain that I shall try to learn some more. And, if possible, especially the nude. But I am afraid I shall not succeed in taking models, as many as I

like and properly, but shall have to find the money for it through making other things, either landscapes or town views or portraits, as I said, or even signboards and decorations. Or what I did not mention in my previous letter among the "by-jobs," which would be possible, to give painting lessons, letting them begin by painting still-life, which I think is a different method than that of the drawing masters. I have tried it on those acquaintances of mine at Eindhoven, and I would dare to repeat it.

I shall certainly leave immediately, as soon as I get the monthly allowance from you. And if you should by chance be able to send it a week earlier, I would also start a week earlier. But of course I do not count on this. I am glad I have now been to see the Amsterdam museum, for I have noticed since that what I saw there has been useful for my work.

Write soon if you have time. As I am busy packing my things, my thoughts are of course more yonder than here.

I kept on painting continually here *to learn painting*, to get firm notions about colour, etc., without leaving much space in my head for other things.

But when I got off to Amsterdam for a few days, I enjoyed seeing pictures again immensely.

For sometimes it is deuced hard to stand quite outside the painter's world, and the pictures, and to have no contact with others. Since then I have felt the longing to go back to them, at least for a time. Having been clean out of it for a few years and having wrestled with nature, that sometimes helps, and one perhaps gets a new store of courage and also of health by it, of which one in any case never has too much, for a painter's life is often hard enough.

As to my work, I shall have to act according to circumstances. I mean if I can get into touch with an art dealer, I must try and get him to show some things of mine. But all is not lost that is delayed, and especially if I may succeed in making new studies of heads or figures, I will soon show you some of them.

The one landscape I am taking with me, and if possible both, but the one with the yellow leaves, I believe you would like it too. I am enclosing a hasty sketch of it.

The horizon is a dark streak against a light streak of sky of white and blue. In that dark streak, little patches of red, bluish and green,



or brown, forming the silhouette of the roofs and orchards, the field greenish. The sky higher up, grey, with the black saplings and yellow leaves against it. The foreground all covered with yellow leaves, in which are two little black figures and a blue one. To the right, a birch trunk, white and black, and a green trunk with red-brown leaves.

Good-bye. Yours with a handshake,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

Very many thanks for the fr. 50 and your letter.

You will be able to understand that I shall leave on Tuesday next, if you consider, firstly, that I am simply longing for it, secondly, that I risk getting stuck here with my work through lack of models, whilst working out of doors has stopped through the cold.

As to my feeling the loss of a studio at Antwerp, yes, I certainly shall. But I must choose between a studio without work here, and work without a studio over there.

I chose the latter. And I did it so gladly that it seems to me like a return from exile. For I have been altogether out of the painter's world for a long time. And meanwhile my power has somewhat ripened, so that I feel more independent of the common intrigues, to chuck someone out. I mean that in the Hague—I was rather weaker than the rest with my brush—I don't say in my drawing, and as they only asked for painting and colour, I was more easily over-thundered than will prove possible now.

As for Rubens, I am looking forward to him very much, but do you object to my thinking Rubens' conception and sentiment of his religious subjects theatrical, often even badly theatrical? Look here—take Rembrandt, Michaelangelo—take the “Penseroso” of Michaelangelo. It represents a thinker, doesn't it?

But his feet are small and swift, but his hand has something of the lightning quickness of a lion's claw and—that thinker is at the same time a man of action, one sees that his thinking is a concentration, but—to jump up and act in some way or other. Rem-

brandt does it *differently*. Especially his Christ in the Emmaus-pilgrims, is more soul in a body, which is not so like a torso of Michaelangelo, at least, but still—the gesture of persuasion, there is something powerful in it.

Now put a Rubens beside it, one of the many figures of meditative persons—and they become people, who have retired to a corner for digestion furtherance purposes. So it is with everything religious or philosophical, there he is *flat* and *hollow*, but what he can paint is—women—like Boucher and better—there especially he gives one most to think and is deepest. What he can do—combinations of colours—what he can do is—paint a queen, a statesman, well analysed, just as they are. But the supernatural—where magic begins, no—unless putting something infinite in a woman's expression, which however is not dramatic. I found a passage about Gainsborough which animates me again to work with one stroke. Look here:

“C'est cette brusquerie de touche, qui donne tant d'effet. La spontanéité de son impression y est tout entière, et se communique au spectateur. Gainsborough avait d'ailleurs une méthode parfaite pour assurer l'ensemble de ses compositions. Il ébauchait tout d'un trait son tableau et le poussait harmonieusement du haut en bas, sans isoler son attention sur de petits fragments, sans s'obstiner aux détails, car il cherchait l'effet général et il la trouvait presque toujours, grâce à cette large vue sur la toile, qu'il regardait comme on regarde la nature d'un seul coup d'œil.”

From Antwerp I will send you the book by Ch. Blanc, etc., as soon as I can add a few studies.

As I don't know where I shall stay, I would ask you to address the letter when you write on the 1st of December, c/o G.P.O., unless I let you know further.

For I shall write again one of these days.

In a magazine I found enclosed sonnet by Jules Breton.

I repeat, as to my rather sudden leaving here, if I had not had trouble with the models, I would still have passed the winter here. But to persist in working with models here, is not so much hampered by the opposition of the priest, which in itself would have been neutralized through my absolutely ignoring it, but the worst is that though I dare stand my ground, people hesitate, and are more frightened than I thought they would be.

And I am not going to undertake it, unless I am quite sure that they dare. Now it might help if I go away for a couple of months, and if it doesn't help, then not one of those whom I gave something for it every week last winter earns a penny on it this winter.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

## ANTWERP

END OF NOVEMBER 1885—END OF FEBRUARY 1886

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Dear Theo,

I want to tell you that I am in Antwerp, and that I have already seen one thing and another. I have taken a little room for fr. 25 a month, Rue des Images No. 194, over a paint dealer. So when you write, kindly send your letter to that address, instead of c/o G.P.O.

I shall begin by telling you that I saw the dining-hall of Leys, you know: "The Walk on the Ramparts," "The Skaters," "The Reception" and "The Table," and on a panel between the windows "St. Luc." To my astonishment the composition was rather different to the definite compositions, at least so I fancy—although I have not yet been able to compare photos of the *pictures* with them.

Then, it was painted in fresco—so on the plaster of the wall. Now fresco really must and can last for centuries, but these have already faded considerably, and especially the one over the mantel-piece (part of "The Reception") shows some cracks already. The highly ingenious son of Lord Leys has also improved the hall by having a door enlarged so that in "The Skaters" the legs of the fellows standing on the bridge, and looking over the railings, have been cut away, which makes a deplorable effect. Besides, the light is terribly bad there; now that hall was originally painted—I fancy—to be used by lamplight. Therefore, because I honestly could not see anything, I gave the servant a tip to light the chandelier for me, and then I could see better.

After so much which had rather disappointed me—first that the colour—in fresco and alas I am afraid *bad* fresco is not what we are used to of Leys—after so much which disappointed me—after all it is superb.



THE STEEN AT ANTWERP





The servant, the woman near the baker's shop, the lovers and other figures in "The Walk on the Ramparts"—the bird's-eye view of the town, the silhouette of the towers and roofs against the sky, the bustle of skaters on the frozen moat—are superb in appearance.

I have also seen the museum of old pictures and the Musée Moderne. I agree with you that the figures on the first plane, those heads in "Le Christ au Purgatoire," are *very* beautiful, finer than the rest, and then the principal figure, especially in those two blonde women's heads, Rubens is first quality.

I was very much struck by the Frans Hals'—"Fisherboy," M. de Vos—portrait of lieutenant of the guild, Rembrandt, *very* beautiful, two small Rembrandts, which perhaps are not by Rembrandt, but by N. Maas? or so?? Jordaens—"as the old sang," van Goyen, S. Ruysdael. And the Quentin Matsys, the drawing "St. Barbara" of van Eyck, etc.

In the Musée Moderne: the great Mols is Mesdag-like, plainly with strokes of Vollon in it. (Vollon knew him well.) Braekeleer, *not* the bad one—a Brabant inn, curiously fine, fine landscapes by C. de Cock, Lamorinière, Coosemans, Asselbergs, Rosseels, Baron, Munthe, Achenbach, a good Clays, two old Leys'—one Braekeleer-like, another romantic, the latter good; a fine portrait by Ingres, a fine portrait by David, other good things, also horrible things like: life-size cows by the God-fearing Verboeckhoven, etc. But at the art dealers I have seen very little, *next to nothing*, one little painting of a hand's size, not even as good as Raffaëlli, otherwise nothing special, and I am afraid that in trade metaphorically death is at the door. But—there is a good old Dutch proverb: "never despair." I like Antwerp, have explored the city in every direction, it is most typical along the quays.

Well, it will never hurt knowing Antwerp a bit, it will surely prove to be like everything everywhere, namely, disillusionizing but with its own atmosphere.

Besides it is good to have a change now and then.

Good-bye, write soon if you can.

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Saturday evening

I want to write you a few more impressions of Antwerp.

This morning I had a typical walk in the pouring rain, the object of this march was to fetch my things from the custom house; the various dockyards and warehouses on the quays are very fine.

I have walked along the docks and the quays several times already, in all directions. Especially when one comes from the sand and the heath and the quiet of a peasant village, and has for a long time been in none but quiet surroundings, the contrast is curious. It is an unfathomable labyrinth. One of de Goncourt's sayings was: "Japonaiserie for ever." Well, those docks are a famous Japonaiserie, fantastical, peculiar, unheard of—at least one can take it in that way.

I should like to walk there with you, just to know whether we see alike. One could make everything there, town views—figures of most varied character—the ships as the principal thing, with water and sky a delicate grey—but by all means—Japonaiserie. I mean, the figures are always in action, one sees them in the queerest surroundings, everything fantastical, and at all moments interesting contrasts present themselves.

A white horse in the mud, in a corner where heaps of merchandise are lying covered by oilcloth—against old black smoky walls of the warehouse. Quite simple, but an effect of Black and White.

Through the window of a very elegant English bar, one will look out on the dirtiest mire, and on a ship, where, for instance, dainty merchandise like hides and buffalo horns, is being unloaded by huge dock hands or exotic sailors; a very dainty fair young English girl is standing at the window looking at it, or at something else. The interior with the figure altogether in tone, and for light—the silvery sky above that mud, and the buffalo horns, again a series of rather sharp contrasts. There will be Flemish sailors, with almost too healthy faces, with broad shoulders, strong and full, and thoroughly Antwerp folk, eating mussels, or drinking beer, and that will happen with a lot of noise and movement—as opposition—a tiny figure in black with her little hands against the body, comes stealing noiselessly along the grey walls. Framed by raven-black hair—a small oval face, brown? orange-yellow? I don't

know. For a moment she lifts her eyelids, and looks with an askant glance from a pair of jet black eyes.

It is a Chinese girl, mysterious, quiet like a mouse—small, bug-like in character. What a contrast to that group of Flemish mussel eaters. Another contrast—one passes through a very narrow street, between tremendously high houses, warehouses, and sheds.

But down below in the street pubs of all nationalities with attending masculine and feminine individuals, shops with eatables, seamen's clothes, motley and crowded.

That street is long, every minute one sees something typical. Now and again there is a row, when a quarrel is going on, intenser than elsewhere, for instance there you are walking, looking about, and suddenly there arises a hurrah, and all kinds of shouting. In broad daylight a sailor is being thrown out of a public-house by the girls, and followed by a furious fellow and a bunch of women, of whom he seems rather afraid—at least I saw him scramble over a heap of sacks and disappear through a warehouse window.

Now, when one has enough of all this tumult—at the end of the piers where the Harwich and Havre steamers lie at anchor, having the city behind, one sees in front nothing, absolutely nothing but an infinite expanse of flat, half-inundated fields, awfully dreary and wet, waving dry rushes, mud, the river with a single little black boat, the water in the foreground grey, the sky, foggy and cold, grey—quiet like a desert.

As to the survey of the harbour or a dock—at one moment it is more tangled and fantastic than a thorn hedge, so confused that one finds no rest for the eye, and gets giddy, is forced by the whirling of colours and lines to look first here, then there, without it being possible, even by looking for a long time at one point, to distinguish one thing from another. But when one stands on a spot, where one has a vague plot as foreground, then one sees the most beautiful quiet lines, and the effects which Mols for instance, often paints.

Now one sees a girl who is splendid of health, and who looks at least loyal, simple and jolly, then again a face so sly and false, that it makes one afraid, as of a hyena. Not to forget the faces damaged by smallpox, which have the colour of boiled shrimps, with pale grey eyes, without eyebrows, and little sleek thin hair, the colour of real pigs' bristles or somewhat more yellow; Swedish or Danish types. It would be fine to work there, but how and where?

For one would very soon get into a scrape.

However I have crossed quite a number of streets and back streets without meeting with adventures, and I have sat and talked quite jovially to various girls that seemed to take me for a skipper.

I don't think it improbable that by painting portraits, I shall get hold of good models.

To-day I got my things and drawing materials, for which I was longing very much. And so my studio is all fixed. If I could get good models almost for nothing, I should not be afraid of anything.

I do not think it so very bad either that I have not got so much money as to be able to force things by paying for them.

Perhaps the idea of making portraits, and having them paid by posing, is the safer way, because in a city it is not as with the peasants. Well, one thing is sure that Antwerp is very curious and fine for a painter.

My studio is not bad, especially as I have pinned a lot of little Japanese pictures on the wall, which amuse me very much. You know those little women's figures in gardens, or on the beach, horsemen, flowers, knotty thorn branches.

I am glad I went, and hope not to sit still this winter. Well, I feel safe now that I have a little den, where I can sit and work when the weather is bad.

But of course I shall not exactly live in immense luxury these days.

Try and send your letter off on the first, because I have provided myself with bread till then, but after that I should be rather in a fix.

My little room is better than I expected, and it certainly doesn't look dull. Now that I have the three studies I took with me, here, I shall try and go to the picture dealers, who however seem to live in private houses, no show window on the street.

The park is nice too, I sat and drew there one morning.

Well, so far I have had no ill luck, as to my lodgings I am well off, as by spending a few francs more I have got a stove and a lamp.

I shall not easily get bored, I assure you. I have also found the *October* of Lhermitte, women on a potato field in the evening, beautiful. But I have not seen *November*, did you get it perhaps?



I have also noticed that there is a *Figaro* illustrated with a fine drawing by Raffaëlli.

My address you know is 194, Rue des Images, so please forward your letter there, and the second part of de Goncourt, when you have finished it.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

It is curious that my painted studies in town seem darker than in the country. Is that because the light everywhere in town is less bright? I don't know, but it may make greater difference than one superficially would say, it struck me, and I could understand that things you have look darker than I in the country thought they were. However, the ones I took with me now don't come out badly for all that, the mill, avenue with autumn trees and a still-life and a few little ones.

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Dear Theo,

(December.)

Thanks for your letter and enclosed fr. 150. I want to tell you that I am glad I came here. Last week I painted three more studies, one with backs of old houses, seen from my window, two in the park. One of those I have exhibited at a dealer's. Further, I have given the ones I brought along from the country, in commission, to two others. At a fourth, I can exhibit a view on the quay as soon as the weather permits me to make it, because he had a Mols together with which he could exhibit another one. Then I have got an address from this dealer, where he assured me I should be well received. Now these dealers are not the biggest ones in Antwerp, but at all their places, amongst many things I did not like, I saw things which pleased me, for instance, one had a picture by van Goyen, and a study by Troyon, at the others I saw a Mols and small Dutch pictures, at another place was that small picture I spoke to you about, like Raffaëlli (it is by Moormans), and a few good water-colours, at another's I found various good marines by young Belgians. Of figure painting I saw very little, and so I intend to try and paint some.

The address that dealer in question gave me happens to be of one of the big dealers, Nicolíć, who do not have show windows, but exhibit in a private house. But I want to come there with figure paintings.

Further, I have discovered useful resources for paint, etc., where I shall be able to come off fairly cheaply. I have also traced Linnig, whom you mentioned to me this summer, when I asked you whether you knew people in Antwerp; but he has *nothing* but a few miserable little old pictures, paints himself somewhat like Vertin, but seemed to me a discouraged man, if he ever had any courage, which I doubt.

All these gentlemen however complain bitterly that trade is so slack, but that is no news. Shortly I hope to be able to go and see that picture you wrote about.

But I have been busy going backwards and forwards, and also finding out those people, and with model-hunting too. The latter is always tremendously difficult, but I have found them elsewhere, and so I shall find them here too. For to-morrow, I have an appointment with a fine old man,—will he come??

To-day I received the supply of paints which they forwarded to me from Eindhoven, and I paid more than fr. 50 for it.

It is hard, terribly hard, to keep on working, when one does not sell, and when one literally has to pay for one's colours from what would not be too much for eating, drinking and lodgings, calculated ever so strictly. And then besides the models. But all the same there is a chance, and even a good one, because, comparatively speaking, there are but few painters at work nowadays.

In my opinion, they are only half to blame for that (for the other half *they are*), for sometimes it is too hard.

All the same, they are building State museums, and the like, for hundreds of thousands, but meanwhile, the artists can go to the dogs.

But, whatever there may be of all this, I wanted to take a look myself into things again, and I find the chance of doing something not smaller, but bigger than I thought. I have seen several photos after Jan v. Beers, some of his things have, after all, much character.

But I imagine that someone like for instance Manet is much more of a *painter* than van Beers, and paints in a finer way and more artistically. If I were better known here, if I could get hold

of the models I saw!—Yesterday I was at the Café-concert Scala, something like the Folies Bergères, I found it very dull, and of course insipid,—but the public amused me. There were splendid women's heads, really extraordinarily fine, amongst the good folks on the back seats, and on the whole I think it true, what is said about Antwerp, that the women are handsome.

Ah! I say it again, if I had my choice in getting models! The mass of German girls leave me quite cool, one would say they are all manufactured after one model, which one sees at the café-concerts.

It seems that one sees that same race everywhere, just like Bavarian beer, it seems to be an article exported wholesale.

I find all those German elements, which nowadays nestle themselves wherever one comes, so terribly annoying. It is sure to be just the same in Paris, they intruding everywhere. But it is an unpleasant thing to talk about.

Through seeing some pictures by others, I get all kinds of ideas for the time when I shall be in the country again next spring, at the same time my conviction that I have to continue with all the strength I possess is also getting stronger.

Antwerp is beautiful in colour, and merely for the subjects it is worth while. One evening I saw a popular ball for sailors, etc., at the docks; it was most interesting and they behaved *quite decently*. However that will not be the case at all those balls.

Here, for instance, nobody was drunk, or drank much.

There were several very handsome girls, the finest of which was ugly. I mean, a figure that struck me as a splendid Jordaens or Velasquez, or Goya—was one in black silk, most likely some barkeeper or other, with an ugly and irregular face, but lively and piquante à la Frans Hals.

She danced perfectly in old-fashioned style. Once, among others, with a well-to-do little farmer, who carried a big green umbrella under his arm, even when he waltzed very quickly.

Other girls wore ordinary jackets and skirts and red scarves; the sailors and cabin boys, etc., jolly nice types of pensioned sea captains, who came to take a look, quite typical. It does one good to see folks actually enjoy themselves.

Well, you see, I don't sit still, but I can't tell you strongly enough how difficult it is to be *court d'argent*.

My best chance is in the figure, because there are relatively but very few who do it, and I must make use of that chance. I must work myself into it here, until I get into touch with good figure painters—Verhaert, for instance, and then I fancy portrait painting is the way to earn the means for greater things.

I feel a power in me to do something, I see that my work holds out against other work, and that gives me a great love to work, and of late when I was in the country, I commenced to doubt, because I noticed that Portier does not seem to care for my things any more.

If I were better off I should be able to paint more, but as far as producing goes, I am partly dependent on my purse.

I have also an idea for a kind of signboard, which I hope to carry out. I mean, for instance, for a fishmonger, still-life of fishes, for flowers, for vegetables, for restaurants.

I think that, if one takes well-composed subjects, 1 metre by 1/2 metre or 3/4 in size, for instance, such a canvas would cost me fr. 50, not more, even perhaps fr. 30, and if possible I will try and make a few. One thing is certain, that I want my things to be seen. Later on we may have to become discouraged, but we will try and put it off for a long time. If you should have time write to me again. The end of the month will certainly be terrible unless you can help me a bit more. A great deal may depend upon my being able to stand to my guns. And one must not look hungry or poor either. On the contrary, one must try and help to make things run.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

439

Dear Theo,

I must write you again, to tell you that I have succeeded in finding a model. I have made two fairly big heads, by way of proof for portrait. First that old man, whom I wrote to you about, a kind of head like Hugo's; then also a study of a woman.

In the woman's portrait I have brought lighter tones in the flesh, white tinted with carmine, vermilion, yellow and a light back-

ground of grey-yellow, from which the face is separated only by the black hair. Lilac tones in the dress.

Rubens certainly makes a strong impression on me, I think his drawing tremendously good, I mean the drawing of heads and hands in themselves. I am fairly carried away by his way of drawing the lines in a face with dashes of pure red, or of modelling the fingers in the hands by the same kind of dashes. I go to the Museum fairly often and then I look at little else but a few heads and hands of his and of Jordaens. I know he is not as intimate as Hals and Rembrandt, but they are so alive, those heads themselves.

Probably I don't look at those which are admired most generally. I look for fragments, like, for instance, those blonde heads in "St. Thérèse au Purgatoire."

Just because of Rubens I am looking now for a blonde model. But you must not be angry if I tell you that I cannot make ends meet this month. I have bought some more paint, and two new kinds of drawing brushes, which suit me splendidly, and with which I can work more correctly.

Then the canvases which I brought with me were too small for the heads, because by using other colours I need more space for the surroundings.

All that and the models are ruining me.

I tell you this as emphatically as possible, because in losing time one loses double.

In the last days of the month when I shall have done some more heads, I hope to paint a view on the Scheldt, for which I have already bought a canvas. I can also go there in bad weather, to an inn at St. Anne's, that is just at the other side, opposite the Lieve Vrouwekerk. Other painters have worked there before.

I am very glad I came here, for in many ways it is useful and necessary for me.

I made the acquaintance of Tyck, the best paint manufacturer here, and he was very kind in giving me information about some colours. The green colours, for instance, they are solid. I also asked him things about the technic of Rubens, which he answered in a way that proved to me how well he analyses how things are done, what everybody does not do, and yet it is a very useful thing.

What more shall I tell you, oh yes, I have seen two collections



of modern pictures, first that which was bought at the exhibition for the lottery, and then a collection of pictures that was for sale.

So I saw several fine things, two studies by Henri de Braekeleer; you know that he is absolutely different from the old de Braekeleer, I mean the one who is a famous colourist, and who analyses vigorously. He is somewhat like Manet, at least as original as Manet.

One study was a woman in a studio, or some such interior, with Japanese objects, the woman wore a costume of yellow and black. The flesh-colour, white with carmine. In the surroundings, all kinds of queer little tones. The other was a half-finished study of a landscape. Yellow, faded, flat fields *à perte de vue*, crossed by a black cinder path, with a ditch along it, over it, a sky of lilac-grey, with accents of carmined lilac. Far away the little red patch of vermilion of a roof, and two little black trees. Hardly anything, and yet much for me, because of the peculiar sentiment for harmonizing colours. I also saw an old study by de Groux, a woman beside a cradle, somewhat like an old Israëls. Further, about those modern pictures what shall I say? Many of them I thought *very fine*, and then I mean especially the work of the colourists, or of those who try to be so, who look everywhere for mother-of-pearl-like combinations in the light parts. But to me, it is far from always being perfect; it is too affected. I prefer to see a simple brush stroke and a less far-fetched difficult colour. More simplicity, in fine that intelligent simplicity which is not afraid of frank technic.

I like Rubens just for his open-hearted way of painting, his working with the most simple means.

I don't count Henri de Braekeleer amongst those who look for mother-of-pearl effects everywhere, because his is a curious, very interesting endeavour to be literally true, and he stands quite apart. I also saw various grey paintings, among others a printing shop by Mertens, a picture by Verhaert representing his own studio, where he himself is sitting etching and his wife standing behind him.

By La Rivière—an Amsterdam undertaker after a funeral, *very fine* in the black tones, a Goya-like conception; that little picture was a masterpiece. In both collections I saw very fine landscapes and marines. But of portraits—those I remember best are the "Fisherboy" by Frans Hals, "Saskia" by Rembrandt, a number of

smiling or weeping faces by Rubens. Ah, a picture must be painted—and why not then simply? When I now look into life itself—I get the same kind of impressions. I see the people in the street, very well, but I often think servant girls so much more interesting and beautiful than the ladies, the workmen more interesting than the gentlemen, and in those common girls and fellows I find a power and vitality, which if one wants to express them in their peculiar character, ought to be painted with a firm brush stroke, with a simple technic.

Wauters understood this, used to at least, for here I have seen nothing by him yet. What I admire so much in Delacroix, too, is that he makes us feel the life of things, and the expression, and the movement, that he *altogether stands out from the paint*.

And in a great many of the good things I saw, though I admire them, there is often far too much *paint*. At present I accustom myself more and more to talk to the models while painting, to keep their faces animated.

I have discovered a woman—she is old now—who used to live in Paris and provided the painters with models, for instance, Scheffer, Gigoux, Delacroix and another who painted a Phryné.

Now she is a washerwoman and knows a lot of women, and could always supply some, she said.

It has been snowing, and the city was splendid early this morning in the snow, fine groups of crossing-sweeps.

I am glad I came here, for I am already full of ideas also for the time when I shall be in the country again.

It was in the *Etoile Belge*, I think, that I read an article taken from the *Figaro* by Eugène Battaille, about conditions in Paris, an article which made on me the impression of being very thorough, but, according to him, conditions in general are very bad. This Mr. Battaille has, contrary to the opinion of the Dutch journalists, expressed himself in Amsterdam also pessimistically about the state of affairs in Holland. As to art dealing—as I have already written you, the dealers here complain *misère ouverte*. And yet I believe that so much still might be done. To name one thing, for instance, in the cafés, restaurants, café-chantants, one sees no pictures, at least hardly any. And how contrary this is to nature. Why don't they hang still-lives there, like the splendid decorations Fijt, Hondekoeter and so many others made in olden times.

Why not women's portraits, if they want cocottes. I know one must work cheaply in those cases, but one can work relatively cheaply. The raising of prices to such a height is the ruin of trade, and leads to no good after all. Good-bye, write again between times if you can.

As to the money, do what you can, but know this that we must try our utmost to succeed. And that idea of painting portraits, I won't let it go, for it is a good thing to fight for, to show people that there is more in them than the photographer can possibly get out of them with his machine.

Good-bye, yours with a handshake,

Vincent.

I have noticed the many photographers here, who are just about the same as everywhere, and seem to have pretty much to do.

But always those same conventional eyes, noses, mouths, wax-like, and smooth and cold.

But it always remains *lifeless*.

And the painted portraits have a life of their own, which comes straightway from the painter's soul, which the machine cannot reach. The more one looks at photographs the more one feels this I think.

440

Dear Theo,

To-day for the first time I feel rather faint—I had painted a picture of “Het Steen” and went to show it to some dealers. Two were not at home, and one did not like it, and one complained bitterly that, in a fortnight, literally not a single person had shown his face in the store. This is not very encouraging, especially when the weather is chilly and gloomy, and when one has changed one's last five franc piece and doesn't know how to get through the next two weeks.

Well. Do try to keep me afloat for those two weeks, for I want to paint some more figures. This morning I heard it said that some of those pictures I wrote to you about had been sold privately—there was a rumour of fr. 21,000, I do not know if it is true, but at

all events there was a crowd of spectators when I was there, and the exhibition for the lottery was also crowded. If there were more and better things on view, more business would be done. But the Art shops have a desolate aspect. The picture of "Het Steen" is rather elaborate, and I shall make another of a different view from the quay.

But I like so much better to paint the figure, I also believe the market might be overflowed by landscapes, and though painting the figure presents more difficulties because of the models, yet after all it gives perhaps a better chance. What the dealers say is that women's heads or women's figures are most likely to sell.

This spring I shall have to decide whether I shall stay or not in the neighbourhood of Nuenen. I should like to hear your opinion about the matter.

I cannot understand why Portier, after his first favourable impression of my work, has become so absolutely indifferent towards it since then. I cannot get on when I must spend *more* on colour than I receive, and I am not a bit, literally not a bit better off than I was years ago, that winter in Brussels. Then I received fr. 50 less, but painting costs me much more than fr. 50, and it has to be paid on the nail.

As long as I am painting I do not feel faint, but in the long run those times between are sometimes rather too melancholy, and it grieves me when I don't get on, and am always in a bad fix. Do you know, for instance, that as long as I have been here, I have had but three warm meals, and for the rest nothing but bread. In this way one becomes vegetarian more than is good for one. Especially as it was the same thing in Nuenen for half a year, and even then I could not pay my colours bill.

Painting is expensive, yet one must paint a great deal. I have half a promise of a model to sit for a portrait, I will do my utmost to get her. Now what I cannot understand, is that people like Portier, like Serret, for instance, if they cannot sell, do not at least see some way of getting me some work. . . .

At the Museum there is a portrait of Delaroche painted by Portaels. During his life he seemed such a big man, but how hollow and empty he proved to be afterwards! Manet and Courbet who did not *seem* serious during their lives, yet how they did prove themselves real painters!

By a curious mishap an accident has happened to the portrait of Delaroche, so that a hole was cut right in the middle of the forehead. It shows off well and seems really to belong to it. Ah! there is quite a curious race of people of whom one would not suppose at certain moments that in fact they are absolutely hollow and empty. One can be mistaken. And sometimes it is quite refreshing to perceive one has been mistaken, though then one has to begin all over again from the very beginning.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

441

Dear Theo,

(19th December 1885.)

To-day I have painted another head of a model whom I could not pay, however, but, having the opportunity, I profited by it.

I also have the firm promise that I shall paint a portrait of somebody, and then in return two studies for me.

But I must tell you that I am at the end of my tether, with my last remaining fr. 5 I had to buy two canvases for those two portraits, and the laundry woman has just brought my washing, so that for the moment I have only a few centimes left.

So I must ask you most urgently, for Heaven's sake don't put off writing, and send me much or little, according to what you can spare, but know that I am literally starving.

If I succeed in getting about fifty heads then there is some chance of getting work, that is, I can try to get employment at a photographer's which I would not like to do permanently but only in time of need. The photographers seem to be quite flourishing here. One finds also painted portraits in their studios, which are apparently painted on a photographed background, which is of course both weak and of little effect to anybody who knows anything about painting.

Now it seems to me, one could get a much better colouring if one worked from studies painted directly from life on the photographs which one wants to have painted. And, after all, at least this is one of the chances one might have to earn something.



But whatever and wherever I may want to start, of course I must have things to show. Because I need all my good spirits, all my vitality, I must confess I am afraid to feel physically weak.

I showed my view of "Het Steen" to another dealer, who liked the tone and the colour of it, but he was too engrossed in making up the inventory, besides he had little room, but he asked me to come back after New Year. It is just the thing for foreigners who want to have a souvenir of Antwerp, and for that reason I shall make still more city views of that kind.

So yesterday I made a few drawings of a spot where one sees the Cathedral.

I also made a little one of the Park.

But I prefer to paint the eyes of people rather than cathedrals, for there is something in the eyes that is not in the cathedral, however solemn and imposing the latter may be—a human soul, be it that of a poor beggar or a woman of the street, is in my eyes more interesting.

So I firmly believe that nothing helps so much to make direct progress as to work from the model.

Of course it is a great nuisance to have to pay the models—it is a time when all energy is needed, and the pictures will have to be energetic, in order to find buyers.

That there is business to be done here, I am sure. There seems to be a lot of beautiful women in this city, and I feel sure money is to be earned by painting women's portraits or women's phantasy heads and figures.

It is a real delight to me to work with a better kind of brushes, and to have cobalt and carmine, and the right kind of yellow brilliant and vermilion.

The most expensive colours are in fact the cheapest, especially cobalt—it cannot be compared to any other blue as to the delicate tones one can get with it.

And although the quality of the colour is not everything in a picture, it is the thing that gives life to it.

As to whether I should like to settle down here for good or not—as the Art trade does not seem exactly rose-coloured here, and as there seems to be a certain tendency among the painters to be each his own art dealer, which will increase more and more I suppose,—the most sensible thing would be perhaps to keep a studio here.

If you have any wishes or ideas about it, either in favour of it or against it, I shall be glad if you will tell me straight out.

But it strikes me at once, that if after a longer or shorter time you might decide to start for yourself (independent of the Goupils) Antwerp might perhaps be the place, where given the dismal show windows of the present, business might be done by showing good things, which the other firms do not understand.

And then it is so convenient to cross over to England from here.

Why in trade are all pictures always in frames? For business it would be so much better if they were light and easy to handle and despatch.

Trade is old-fashioned and . . . thrice decayed.

There must be renovation, for the old systems do not work well any longer.

The prices, the public, everything needs renovation, and the future is to work cheaply for the people, because the common amateurs seem to become tight-fisted more and more in short.

To start with capital so very often leads only to losing everything at first, including one's courage and energy, whilst to begin with comparatively nothing rather makes one's character firmer and more decided.

Good-bye, but try to write to me by return of post, for I feel rather faint, as I have rather overstrained myself with one thing and another, and I need my strength.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

442

Dear Theo,

(28th December 1885.)

It is high time for me to thank you for the fr. 50 you sent which helped me to pass the month, though from to-day it will be pretty much the same.

But—there are a few more studies made, and the more I paint the more progress I think I make. As soon as I received the money I took a beautiful model and painted the head of it life-size.

It is quite light except for the black you know. Yet the head

itself stands out simply against a background, in which I tried to put a golden shimmer of light.

Here follows the colour gamut—a well-toned flesh-colour, in the neck rather bronze-like, jet black hair—black which I had to make with carmine and prussian blue, dirty white for the little jacket, light yellow, much lighter than the white, for the background. A touch of scarlet in the jet black hair and a second scarlet bow in the dirty white.

It is a girl from a *café chantant*, and yet the expression which I sought was rather *Ecce Homo*-like.

But as I want to remain *real*, especially in the expression, though I can let my fancy go, this is what I wanted to express in it.

When the model came, she had been apparently very busy the last few nights, and she said something that was rather characteristic: “*Pour moi le champagne ne m’égaye pas, il me rend tout triste.*”

Then I understood, and I tried to express something voluptuous and pathetic at the same time.

From the same model, I began a second study in profile.

Then I made that portrait which I spoke about, that was promised to me, and I painted a study of that head for myself, and now these last days of the month, I hope to paint another head of a man.

Especially about the work I feel quite cheerful, and it is good for me to be here.

I fancy that even of those women, one can make them pay perhaps still more than in any other way. There is no denying that they are sometimes damn beautiful and that it is the spirit of the time that that kind of picture is wanted more and more.

And even from the highest artistic point of view, nothing can be said against it; *to paint human beings*, that was the old Italian art, that was what Millet did and what Breton does.

The question is only whether one starts from the soul or from the clothes, and whether the form serves as a clothes-peg for ribbons and bows, or if one considers the form as the means to express impression and sentiment, or if one models for the sake of modelling, because it is so infinitely beautiful in itself.

Only the first is transitory, and the latter two are both high art.

What rather pleased me, was that the girl who posed for me wanted me to paint my portrait for her similar to the one I made.

And she has promised as soon as possible to let me paint a study of her in her room, in a dancer's dress.

She cannot do this now, because the owner of the café where she is objects to her posing, but as she is going to live in rooms with another girl, both she and the other girl would like to have their portraits painted. And I fervently hope that she will come back, for she has a characteristic face and is witty.

But I must train myself, for to be sure, it all depends on skillfulness and quickness; for they have not much time or patience, besides, the work need not be less well done for being done quickly, and one must be able to work, even if the model does not sit rigidly still. Well, you see that I am at work with full animation. If I sold something so that I earned a little more, I should work more vigorously still.

As to Portier, I do not lose courage yet, but poverty is at my door, and at present the dealers all rather suffer from the same evil, that of being more or less out of the limelight. They have too much spleen, and how can one be expected to feel inclined to dip in all that indifference and dullness; besides, this complaint is catching.

For it is all nonsense that no business is to be done, but one must work in any case, with conviction and with enthusiasm, in short with a certain warmth.

As to Portier, you wrote me yourself that he was the first to exhibit the impressionists, and that he was over-thundered by Durand Ruel.

Well, one might conclude thereof, that he is a man of initiative, not only saying things but doing them. Perhaps it is the fault of his sixty years, and for the rest his case is perhaps one of the many, in which at the time when pictures were the fashion and business prospered, a lot of intelligent persons were wantonly put aside, as if they were of no importance and without talent, only because they could not trust themselves to believe in the stability of that craze for pictures, and the enormous raising of prices.

*Now* that business is slack, one sees those very same dealers who were so very enterprising, let us say ten years ago, become right out of the limelight. And we are not yet at the end.

Personal initiative with little or no capital is perhaps the germ for the future in short.

Yesterday I saw a large photograph after a Rembrandt, which I did not know, which struck me tremendously, it was a woman's head, the light fell on the bust, neck, chin and the nostrils—the lower jaw.

The forehead and eyes in shadow of a large hat, with probably red feathers. Probably also red or yellow in the cut-out jacket. A dark background. The expression, a mysterious smile like that of Rembrandt himself in his own portrait, where Saskia is sitting on his knee and he has a glass of wine in his hand.

My thoughts are all the time full of Rembrandt and Hals these days, not because I see so many of their pictures, but because I see among the people here so many types that remind me of that time.

I still go often to those popular balls, to see the heads of the women, and the heads of the sailors and soldiers. One pays the entrance fee of 20 or 30 centimes, and drinks a glass of beer, for they drink very little spirits, and one can amuse oneself a whole evening, at least I do, by looking how these people enjoy themselves.

To paint much from the model—that is what I have to do, and it is the only thing that seriously helps to make progress.

I notice that I have been underfed too long, and when I received your money my stomach could not digest the food; but I will try to remedy that.

And it does not prevent my having all my energy and capacity when at work.

But when I am out of doors, the working in the open air is too much for me, and I feel too faint.

Well, painting is a thing that wears one out. But Van der Loo<sup>1</sup> told me when I went to see him shortly before I came here, that after all I am fairly strong. That I need not despair of reaching the age which is necessary for producing a life's work. I told him that I knew of several painters, who notwithstanding all their nervousness, etc., reached the age of sixty or seventy even, luckily for themselves, and that I should like to do the same.

Then I think that if one keeps one's serenity and good spirits, the mood in which one is, is a great help. In that respect I have gained by coming here, for I have got new ideas and I have new means of expressing what I want, because better brushes will help me, and I am getting crazy about those two colours, carmine and cobalt.

<sup>1</sup> Van der Loo—the physician at Eindhoven.



Cobalt is a divine colour, and there is nothing so beautiful to bring atmosphere around things. Carmine is the red of wine, and it is warm and witty like wine.

The same for emerald-green. It is bad economy not to use these colours, the same for cadmium.

Something about my constitution which made me very glad was what a doctor in Amsterdam told me, whom I consulted once about a few things which sometimes made me fear that I should not be able to hold out long, and whose opinion I did not ask straight out, but just to know the first impression of somebody who absolutely did not know me. It was this, profiting from a small complaint I had then, in the course of conversation, I hit on my constitution in general—how glad I was this doctor took me for an ordinary working man and said: “I suppose you are an ironworker.” That is just what I have tried to change in myself; when I was younger, I looked like one who has been intellectually overwrought, and now I look like a skipper or an ironworker.

And to change one’s constitution so that one gets “le cuir dur” is no easy matter.

But I must be careful withal, and try to keep what I have, and gain in strength.

I want you above all to write me if the idea seems so absurd to you that one would gain in courage if one planted the germ of a business of one’s own?

About my work at present, I feel that I can do better; however, I need some more space and air, I mean—I ought to be able to spend a little more. Above all, above all I cannot take models enough. I could produce work of a better quality, but my expenses would be heavier. But is it not so that one must aim at something lofty, something true, of some distinction?

The women’s figures which I see here among the people, make a tremendous impression on me, much more to paint them than to possess them, though indeed I should like both.

I read over again the book by de Goncourt. It is excellent. The preface to “Chérie” which you will read, tells the story of what the de Goncourts went through, and how at the end of their lives, they were melancholy, yes, but felt sure of themselves, knowing that they had *accomplished* something, that their work would remain. What fellows they were. If we thought more

alike than we do now, if we could agree absolutely why should not we *do the same*?

By the by, because I shall have in any case at the end of this year, four or five days of absolute fast in everything, do send your letter on the first of January and not later. Perhaps you will not be able to understand, but it is true when I receive the money, my greatest appetite is not for food, though I have fasted, but the appetite for painting is stronger still, and I set out at once to hunt for models, and continue until all the money is gone. While all I have to live on is my breakfast from the people where I live, and in the evening for supper a cup of coffee and bread in the dairy, or else a black loaf that I have in my trunk.

As long as I am painting it is more than sufficient, but when the models have left, there comes a feeling of weakness.

I am attached to the models here, because they are so different from the models in the country. And especially because the character is so entirely different, and the contrast gives me new ideas, especially for the flesh-colours. And what I have now reached in the last head I painted, though it is not yet so that I am satisfied with it, yet it is different from the former heads.

I know that you are convinced enough of the importance of being *true*, so that I can speak out freely to you.

If I paint peasant women I want them to be peasant women, for the same reason, if I paint harlots I want a harlot-like expression.

That was why the harlot's head by Rembrandt struck me so enormously. Because he had caught so infinitely beautifully that mysterious smile, with a gravity as only he possesses, the magician of magicians.

This is for me a new thing, and it is essentially what I want. Manet has done it, and Courbet, damn it, I have the same ambition, besides, I have felt too strongly in bone and marrow the infinite beauty of the women analyses of the very great men in literature, a Zola, Daudet, de Goncourt, Balzac.

Even Stevens does not satisfy me, because his women, his women are not those I know personally. And those he chooses are not the most interesting I think. Well, however that may be—I want to get on *à tout de pris*—and I want to be myself.

I feel quite obstinate, and I do not care any more what people say about me or about my work.

It seems very difficult here to get models for the nude, at least the girl I painted refused.

Of course that "refused" is perhaps but relative, but at least it would not be easy, but I must say she would be splendid. From a business point of view I can only say that we are already in what one calls—*la fin d'un siècle*, that women have a charm like this in a time of revolution—in fact have as much importance—and one would be outside the fashion if one kept her outside one's work.

It is everywhere the same, in the country as well as in the city; one must take the women into account if one wants to be up-to-date.

Good-bye, good wishes for the New Year. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(January 1886.)

It is already late, but I will not put off acknowledging the good receipt of your letter, with enclosed fr. 150.

By the by, let me begin to answer your question of some time ago, about the picture by Franck or Francken at St. André which I saw to-day. I think it is a good picture—especially fine in sentiment—the sentiment is not very Flemish or Rubens-like. It reminds more of Murillo. The colour is warm in a reddish gamut like Jordaens sometimes is.

The shadows in the flesh are very strong, that is what Rubens has not, and Jordaens often has, and that gives something mysterious to the picture which one must appreciate in that school.

I could not come near enough to analyse the technic from near by which would have been well worth while. The head of Christ is less conventional than the Flemish painters usually conceive it.

But I imagine I can also do it in that way, and the picture did not tell me anything new.

And as I am not satisfied with what I can do now, and try to make progress—enough—let us talk about other pictures. What struck me in that church was a sketch by Van Dyck or Rubens? "The Descent from the Cross," which hung high, but seemed very

beautiful to me. Much sentiment in the pale corpse—this by the way.

There is a painted window which I think superb—very, very curious. A beach, a green sea with a castle on the rocks, a sparkling blue sky of the most beautiful tones of blue, greenish, whitish, deeper, higher of tone.

An enormous three-master, quaint and phantasmal, stands out against the sky, suffusion everywhere, light in the dark, dark in the light. In the blue a figure of the Holy Virgin, bright yellow, white, orange. Higher up is the window again, dark green, with black with fiery red.

Well—do you remember it? It is very beautiful, and Leys would certainly have fallen in love with it, or James Tissot in his old manner or Thys Maris.

I saw some pictures bought for the Musée Moderne, by Verhas and Farasyn. Verhas—Ladies mounted on donkeys, and fisher boys on the beach. Farasyn—A large picture of the old Antwerp Fishmarket.

Also an Emile Wauters—"A Market in Cairo." The Verhas looks well, it is a clever picture at all events, daring of colour, in a light gamut, several beautiful combinations, among others, a figure in orange against light blue, light green and white.

I am all the time working on my portraits, and I have at last made two which are decidedly good "likenesses" (one profile and one three-quarter). That is not everything, that is not even the most important. But still it seems to me worth while to aim at it, and perhaps it teaches one to draw. Besides, I am getting more and more fond of making portraits. Now, for instance, some of those very famous Rubens': "Vierge au Perroquet," "Christ à la Paille," etc. I walked past them to look rather at that daring man's portrait—painted with such a remarkably firm hand—still sketchy here and there, which is hanging not far from Rembrandt's "Saskia."

In "The Descent from the Cross" by Van Dyck, the large one, that one in the height—there is also a portrait, decidedly a portrait—not only of a head, but, thank God, of a whole figure, splendid in yellow and lilac, a weeping woman bending over, the torso and the legs under the clothes well and intimately felt and expressed. Then art is high when it is simple and true.

And an Ingres, a David, who as painters certainly did not always paint beautifully, yet how remarkably interesting even they become, when putting their pedantry aside they forget themselves in being true, in reproducing a character like the two heads in the Musée Moderne. In short—Oh, if one could only get the models one wants!!!

Now just tell me, always supposing that you want to be a financier—and I have nothing against it, it is even a thing that I highly approve of; are you then quite satisfied with your own argument, when at the beginning of the year, you say to my disappointment: “I have so much to pay, so you must try to manage till the end of the month.”

Just listen, this is what I have to say against it, and just think it over whether I am right or not, at least if there is truth in my argument. Am I less than your creditors, who must wait, *they or I*??? If one of us *must* wait, which belongs to the human possibilities?

A creditor is *no friend* to be sure, and I, if you do not know it *for sure*, I am so perhaps. And do you realize how heavy for me are the burdens which the work demands every day, how difficult to get the models, how expensive the painting materials? Do you realize that sometimes it is almost literally impossible for me to keep going? and that I *must* paint, that too much depends on my continuing to work here with aplomb *immediately* and without *hesitation*?

Too much hesitation might make me fall in a way which I could not redress for a long time. My situation is threatened from every side, and it can only be gained by working on vigorously. The colour bill is as a millstone round my neck, and yet I must *go on!!!*

I too must keep people waiting, and without mercy; they will *get their money* but they will have to wait, it cannot be helped—the less credit they give, the longer they will have to wait.

The only way to win at present, is with very good work, with something that is not ordinary. That higher work costs more in money, in trouble, and in heavy exertion; but more than ever it is the way now.

What I tell you is simple and clear. Do you understand or not, that I am perfectly right when I point out to you the absolute



necessity of having my studio full of very *good* heads, if I want to get orders for portraits here? That is possible, it is a thing we can see the end of, though relatively it is not easy to get them done.

Now, shall we say like dullards and blockheads—"we cannot, we have no money—there is nothing doing, I tell you *No*." This is what we will say—and please let us say it together, personally we will be poor for it, and suffer want as long as it is necessary, *like one does in a besieged city* which one does not intend to surrender, but we will show that we are *somebody*.

Either one is brave or one is a coward. We must bring it so far that the public begins to like it. I mean, for instance, that the girls will begin to like having their portraits made, I am sure that there are some who want them.

To-day I spoke to an employee of a photographer, and asked him if he could not procure me orders for portraits. He wanted a commission for every woman he would bring to me for a portrait. I let the matter rest, in so far only, that I did not promise any commission before I knew my man somewhat better. But probably I shall see him again soon.

And then I shall see if I can do anything with him directly, or if I shall go and speak to his boss; but sometimes the employee is better, that depends. I told him now that I did not know him, and that I should like to see what he could do, but that it was a risk for me, because a portrait always incurs expenses for me. Well, I shall see later; but the most urgent is that I have some fine heads to show. I must also try to make acquaintances among the women, which is not a pleasant task when one has a purse with very little in it. I can assure you it is no pleasure then.

But it is not the taking trouble that I am afraid of. But I believe that you have so accustomed yourself to finding it all right when I am always pushed back, that you forget too much, how for so many years already I have not had my due.

And that when I want to expand my business, it is not only good for me, but for you too, because only in that way can I earn something.

And now another thing. Theoretically at least you say that it is necessary to be well dressed, and to have everything in keeping on certain occasions when one has to go and see people, etc. Well,

the time has come that it is necessary even to me, who, as you know, am not keen on such things. Are such things necessary or not??? Does anything depend on it—Yes or No?

Well, given that period of having to break through, the monthly allowance is too small for me to possibly make both ends meet.

You are economical yourself, you understand what is *absolutely* needed. And I ask you, can one do what is absolutely necessary with what remains for oneself after paying for painting materials, models, and rent? If I had some friends, if I were a little known, yes, then it would be easier, but I have no friends and I must just make them.

But do not let me forget to thank you for sending the second volume of *de Goncourt*. It is a delightful thing to be able to study that period—from which *so much can be learned*, for—to use the expression—*notre fin du siècle* in which we live.

I cannot tell you how glad I am that I went to Antwerp, and how many remarkable things there are there for me, who has been so long out of it all.

How glad I am to see the city again, much though I like the peasants in the country. How the bringing together of contrasts gives me new ideas—the contrasts of the *absolute quiet of the country and the bustle here*. I needed it badly.

As to the “Exhibition Tassaert,” if ever a man was wronged it is he. To name another at the same time—I do not wait for exhibitions to have my opinion about painters—*Chaplin* will also have to be recognized. As to the colour of Tassaert, he is a harmonist, and his work, almost painted in one tone, is beautiful because of the modelling, because of the delicate sentiment of the female forms, because of something passionate in the expressions—and I think he belongs to the family of the Greuzes and Prudhons—better, more modern, more serious in sentiment than Greuze. Chaplin is a greater colourist than he is.

And I think it rather a pity in Tassaert that he, who painted human flesh so well, did not put more glow and life in the colour. But for sure he is better than Scheffer and Delaroche, and Dubuffe and Gérôme who are so little *painter*.

What a great pity it is for a fellow like Gérôme, who painted “The Prisoner” and “The Russian Camp” and “The Syrian Shepherds” that he is so cold and sterile. They will also have to

recognize Isabey, Ziem too, these two are real *painters*, and that is what is needed in painting after all.

I must finish. What colour is in a picture, enthusiasm is in life, therefore—it is no little thing to try to keep that enthusiasm.

For the sake of the models I think I shall go this month and see Verlat who is the director of the Academy here—and I must see what the conditions are, and if one could work there from the nude. I shall take a portrait and some drawings with me then.

I have an immense longing to improve my knowledge of the nude. I have seen a large bronze group by Lambeau—two figures—a man clasping a woman, *superb*. Something like, for instance, Paul Dubois, or in short the first-class people. It has been bought for the Museum.

I often envy the sculptors. But it is rather the same everywhere. I ought to be able to earn more in order to be able to work more.

I must also tell you, that in view of that longing for study of the figure, in case I did not succeed here, I should rather go farther away than go back to Holland before I had worked for a time at some studio. That “further” might perhaps be Paris, without hesitation.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

As to the end of the month—I beg you most kindly but absolutely—let one of your creditors wait, i.e. at least for fr. 50 (they can stand it, do not be afraid), but please do not let it be me, for *even then* it will still be tough for me.

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Dear Theo,

Last Sunday I saw for the first time the two large pictures by Rubens, and as I had looked at those in the Museum repeatedly and at my ease, these two—“The Descent from the Cross” and “The Elevation of the Cross”—were the more interesting. “The Elevation of the Cross” has a peculiarity that struck me at once,

and that is—it has no woman's figure. Unless on the side wings of the triptych. Consequently, it is none the better for it. Let me tell you that I love "The Descent from the Cross." But not for the sake of a depth of feeling which one would find in a Rembrandt or in a picture by Delacroix or in a drawing by Millet.

Nothing touches me less than Rubens when he expresses human sorrow.

To express more clearly my meaning, let me begin by saying that even his most beautiful weeping Magdalenes or Mater Dolorosas always simply remind me of the tears of a beautiful harlot who has caught venereal disease or such-like small misery of human life.

As such they are masterly, but one must not look for more in them.

Rubens is extraordinary in painting ordinarily beautiful women. But in the expression he is not dramatic.

Compare him, for instance, to that head by Rembrandt, in the La Caze Collection; to the man's figure in "The Jewish Bride"—you will understand what I mean, that, for instance, his eight pompous figures of fellows who perform a trick with a heavy wooden cross, in "The Elevation of the Cross," seem absurd to me as soon as I put myself on the point of modern analysis of human passions and feelings. That Rubens is, in his expressions, especially of the men (the real portraits always excepted) superficial; hollow, pompous, yes—altogether conventional, like Jules Romain and worse people of the decadence.

But still I love it, because he, Rubens, is the very man who tries to, and really succeeds in expressing a mood of cheerfulness, of serenity, of sorrow, by the combination of colours—though his figures may be sometimes hollow, etc.

Thus in "The Elevation of the Cross" the pale spot of the corpse in a high keynote of light—is dramatic in its relation of contrast to the rest, which is put so low.

The same thing, but in my opinion far more beautiful, is the charm of "The Descent from the Cross," where the pale spot is repeated by the blonde hair, the fair face and neck of the women's figures, whilst the sombre surroundings are enormously rich by the diverse low-toned harmonizing masses of red, dark green, black, grey and violet.

And Delacroix has again tried to make people believe in the symphonies of the colours. And one would almost say in vain if one thinks how almost everybody understands by good colour the correctness of the local colour, the narrow-minded exactness, which neither Rembrandt nor Millet nor Delacroix nor whosoever, neither Manet nor Courbet has aimed at as little as Rubens or Veronèse.

I have also seen several other pictures by Rubens in different churches.

And it is very interesting to study Rubens, because he is in his technic so very simple, or rather seems to be so. His means are so simple, and he paints, and especially also draws, with such a quick hand and without any hesitation. But heads and figures of women, these are his speciality. There he is deep and intimate too. And how fresh his pictures remain, by the very simplicity of the technique.

What further shall I say? That I like more and more to make all my figure-studies over again, very calmly and quietly, without hurrying nervously. I want to progress so far in the knowledge of the nude, and the structure of the figure, that I could work from memory.

I should still like to work some time either at Verlat's or at some other studio, besides working for myself as much as possible from the model.

For the moment I have deposited five pictures, two portraits, two landscapes, and one still-life at Verlat's painting class at the Academy. I have just been there again, but each time he was not there.

But I shall soon be able to tell you the result, and I hope that I shall be allowed to paint from the model all day at the Academy, which will make things easier for me, as the models are so awfully expensive, that my purse cannot stand it.

And I must find something to help me in that respect. At all events I think I shall remain some time in Antwerp, instead of going back to the country; that would be much better than putting it off, and there is so much more chance here to find people who would interest themselves in it perhaps. I feel that I dare something, and can achieve something, and things have been dragging already far too long.



The other day I saw, for the first time, a fragment of Zola's new book "L'Œuvre" which, as you know, appears as a serial in "Le Gil Blas."

I think that this novel, if it penetrates in the Artist's world, may do some good. The fragment I read was very characteristic.

If necessary, I will admit that when working absolutely from nature, something more is needed—the facility of composing, the knowledge of the figure, but, after all, I do not believe I have been drudging absolutely for nothing all these years. I feel a certain power within me, because wherever I may be, I shall always have an aim, the painting of people as I see them and know them.

Whether impressionism has already had its last say or not—to keep to the expression impressionism—I always fancy that in figure drawing many new artists will arise, and I begin to find it more and more desirable that, in a difficult time like the present, one must seek one's security in the deeper understanding of the highest art.

For there is, relatively, higher and lower art; some *people* are of more interest than others, and in fact are much more difficult to paint, too.

I will try hard to make acquaintances here, and I think that if I worked some time, for instance with Verlat, I would learn to know better what is going on here, and how to fit in with the rest.

So let me struggle along my own way, and for Heaven's sake do not lose courage, and do not slacken. I do not think you can reasonably expect me to go back to the country, for the sake of a possible fr. 50 a month less, when the whole series of future years depends so much on the relations which I must make in town, either here in Antwerp or later in Paris.

And I wish I could make you understand how probable it is, that there will be great changes in the art trade. And, in consequence many new chances will come too, if one has something original to show.

But *that* is necessary then, if one wants to be of some use. It is no fault or no crime of mine, when I tell you you must put more strength in such and such a thing, and if we have not the money ourselves, we must find friends and new relations. I must earn a little more or have some more friends, preferably both. That is the way to success, but of late it has been too hard for me.

As for this month, I absolutely must insist on your sending me at least another fr. 50.

I am getting thinner every day, and my clothes are getting in a bad state, etc. You know yourself that it is not right as it is. Yet I feel a sort of confidence that we shall pull through.

But you wrote that if I fell ill we should be worse off. I hope it will not come to that, but I should like to have a little more ease, just for the sake of preventing an illness.

Just to think how many people there are who exist without ever having the slightest idea what care is, and who always keep on thinking that everything will turn out for the best, as if there were no people starving or altogether ruined! I begin to object more and more to your pretending to be a financier, and thinking of me just the reverse. All people are not alike, and when one does not understand that in drawing up accounts some *time* must have passed over the account before one can be sure to have counted right, if one does not understand this, one *is no financier*. And broader insight in finances is just what characterizes many modern financiers. Viz., not pinching, but giving freedom of action.

I know, Theo, how you are perhaps also rather hard up. But your life has never been so hard as mine these last ten or twelve years. Can you then not allow for me, when I say, perhaps it has been long enough now. I have learnt, meanwhile, something which I did not know before, that has renewed all my chances, and I protest against my being put back always. And if I should like to live again in the city some time, and afterwards perhaps to work at a studio in Paris too, would you try to prevent this?

Be frank enough to let me go my own way, for I tell you I do not want to quarrel, and I will not quarrel, but I will not be hampered in my career. And what can I do in the country, unless I come there with money for models and paint? In the country there is no chance, absolutely none, of making money with my work, and in the city such a chance exists. So I am not safe before I have made friends in the city, and that comes in the first place. For the moment, this may rather complicate things, but after all it is the way, and to go back to the country now would end in stagnation.

Well good-bye. The book by de Goncourt is fine.

Yours,  
Vincent.

Dear Theo,

(January.)

I want to tell you that at last Verlat has seen my work, and when he saw the two landscapes and the still-life which I had brought from the country, he said: "Yes, but that does not concern me;" when I showed him the two portraits he said: "That is different, if it is figure drawing you can come." So to-morrow I begin to work in the painting class of the Academy.

Besides, I have arranged with Vinck (a pupil of Leys of whom I saw things in the manner of Leys, mediæval) to draw in the evening from the antique.

I think neither of these things will do me harm, and perhaps can be of some use to me either in painting or in drawing. And at all events, it is an attempt to come in touch with people. In the painting and in the drawing class I saw in passing several people of my age at work.

And if I might get on friendly terms with Verlat or Vinck or whoever it may be, it will certainly save me a lot of models.

Well, this is essentially the practical side of the matter.

Then I have to go and see two people for the sake of portraits, I do not know what the result will be.

One is a question of two portraits of a couple of very beautiful girls, types with dark eyes, dark hair, two sisters, who I suppose are cocottes.

And the other is a portrait of a married woman. But I repeat there is nothing fixed, and it may come to nothing.

But I know that eventually I should be willing to make them gratis just for practice.

But just think if I must go and work there or anywhere else, it is necessary that I see to my clothes, for I have worn mine for two years, and especially of late they are worn out. Even a suit of perhaps fr. 40 would do.

And I must also be prepared that when Verlat says I have to provide myself with some painting material or other, I shall have the means to do so. Therefore, try as I asked you to send me another fr. 50, then I can reach the end of the month and would buy a new pair of trousers and a waistcoat at once, and the coat in February.

It is very cold here, and I feel far from well most of the time, but as long as the painting flourishes, that does not matter so much.

I have been drawing there already for two evenings, and I must say that I believe that just for the making of, for instance, peasant figures, it is very useful to draw from the casts. But please not as it is usually done. In fact the drawings which I see there are in my opinion all remarkably bad and absolutely wrong, and I know for sure that mine are totally different. Time must show who is in the right.

The sentiment of what antique sculpture is, damn it, *not one of them has it*.

I, who for years had not seen any good ancient casts, and those they have here are very good, and who during all these years have always had the living model before me, on seeing them again I am struck dumbfounded by the wonderful knowledge and the correctness of sentiment of the ancients.

Well, probably the academical gentlemen will accuse me of heresy, but never mind. I should like to get on with Verlat. Many of the things he makes I think both hard and wrong in colour and *paint*, but *I know that he has also his good days*, for instance, that he paints a better portrait than most of the rest. So we must wait and see.

I feel in high spirits notwithstanding all, just because it refreshes me to be in all kinds and conditions quite opposite to the country, and it may be that I shall feel at home here after all—but do your best to write me soon, and really it is necessary that I get those fr. 50 for this month, otherwise I cannot manage, and things are too urgent. Good-bye,

Yours,  
Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I have now been painting at the Academy for a few days, and I must say that I like it pretty well. Especially because there are all kinds of painters there, and I see them work in the most varied ways, what I never experienced before—to see others work.

By far the best thing for me will be to stay here a long time, for the models there are good, and it will save a great deal of expense. I repeat what I told you already before, you have no exact idea of the expenses of painting and models, and it is much more difficult than you seem to know, especially if one works alone. But we will hope that in this way things will better themselves.

Next Monday we shall get new models; in fact, then I shall begin in earnest, and for Monday I ought to have had a large canvas; they also told me decidedly that I must have other brushes, etc.

But I have not any money left, so it is really pressing and I wish you would do what you can, for I also am doing what I can, and it is almost all the time so that hardly anything is left for food.

In the evening I also go there to draw, but I think the people of the drawing class all work badly and absolutely wrongly.

The painting class is better, and, as I think I wrote you already, there are all kinds of people and of all ages, about five of them even older than I am.

I am working for the moment on a child's head.

It would be a relief for me if I could have your letter before Monday. What I wrote you about the clothes I should want is also rather urgent. I have already made a few acquaintances who have seen the things I had brought for the admission.

Among the studies of former pupils that are hanging there, are some damned good ones.

There are some by Neuhuys and Huibers among others.

But the best is perhaps by an American; I do not know the name. A nude study of an old man, one would say like a Fortuny or a Regnault.

I do not think I can take a shorter way to make progress, and whether I go to the country afterwards or to a studio in Paris, at all events it is a good thing to see how many others paint, and especially to work regularly from the model as much as ever is possible.

Good-bye, I write to you in a hurry because I must go to my work. But try your utmost not to keep me waiting, for the work depends on it, and I assure you in any case it will be hard enough for me.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.



Dear Theo,

I have already delayed too long to tell you of the safe receipt of your letter and enclosure.

In any case I think it will do no harm if we see each other after a while in Paris. As to your letter it is always the same, and in your judgment of me you rely too much, in my opinion, on common-places and on prejudices, which are too superficial and too incorrect for me to believe you will stick to them always.

I have been tremendously busy this week, for besides the painting class, I go and draw also in the evening, and after that, from half-past ten till half-past eleven, I work from the model at a club. For I have become a member of two of these clubs even, and I now know two fellows who draw well I think, both Dutchmen.

This week I painted a large thing with two nude torsos—two wrestlers posed by Verlat, and I like that very much.

And the same for the drawing from the casts. I have now finished two large figures. At all events there are two things to be said for it, in the first place it interests me, after having drawn for years from clad models, to see again the nude, and the ancients, and to verify things.

In the second place, to be accepted somewhere in Paris, one must have worked somewhere else before, and not be absolutely green any more, and one always meets with people who for a longer or shorter time have already worked at an academy.

The advice Verlat gives me is very severe, and also what Vinck of the drawing class tells me, and they strongly advise me especially to draw for at least a year, *if possible* to draw nothing but from casts and the nude, and that this would be the *shortest* way, and I shall come back quite differently then, to my other outdoor work or my portraits, and I believe it is true, so I must try to be somewhere where both casts and models for the nude are within my reach, at least to begin with.

The head of the class has done the same, and he says that with each study he felt he was making progress, and I have noticed that myself in his old things and his recent ones.

I suppose you remember "Les Grecs ne prennent pas par le contour, ils prennent par les milieux, par les noyaux. Géricault

a pris cela à Gros, qui lui l'avait pris des Grecs, mais Géricault a voulu lui-même le prendre aux Grecs aussi, et les a étudiés pour cela même; après Delacroix a fait comme Géricault."

That question—Millet too draws in the same way more than anybody else—is perhaps the root of all figure painting, depends enormously on that modelling drawing directly with the brush, quite a different conception from Bouguereau and others who lack interior modelling, who are *flat* compared to Géricault and Delacroix, and do not stand out from the paint.

With the latter Géricault, etc., the figures have backs even when one sees them from the front, there is atmosphere round the figures—*standing out from the paint*.

It is to find this—about which I would not care to speak to Verlat, neither with Vinck—that I am working, no fear *they* would teach me this for the fault of both is in the colour, which, as you know, is by none of them good. When I compare my study with those of the other fellows, it is curious to see that they have almost nothing in common.

Theirs have about the same colour as the *flesh*, so seen from near by they are very correct—but if one stands back a little they appear painfully flat—all that pink and delicate yellow, etc., etc., soft in itself, produces a harsh effect. As I do it, from near by it is greenish red, yellowish grey, white-black and many neutrals and most of them colours one cannot define. But when one stands back a little it stands out from the paint, and there is atmosphere around it, and there falls on it a certain vibrating light. At the same time, the least little touch of colour which one uses eventually as glasis, is effective on it.

But what I lack is practice, I must paint about fifty of them, I think I shall have reached something then. The putting down of the paint is done too *diffidently*, because I have not enough practice, must hesitate too long and work the life out of it. But that is a question of a time of exercise, till the touch becomes at once correct, the better one has it fixed in one's mind.

Some of the fellows have seen my drawings, one of them, induced by the drawing of my peasant figures, has begun at once to draw the model in the class for the nude with a much stronger modelling, putting the shadows down firmly. He showed me this drawing and we talked it over; it was full of life, and it was the finest drawing I

have seen here of any of the fellows. Do you know what they think of it here? The teacher Sibert purposely sent for him, and said if he dared to do it again in the same way it would be considered that he mocked the teacher. And I assure you it was the only drawing that was well done, like Tassaert or Gavarni. So you see how things are. However, it does not matter, and one must not get angry about it, but pretend one should like to cure oneself of the bad habit, but unluckily falls back into it all the time. The figures they draw are almost always top-heavy and fall forward head over heels, not a single one *stands* on its feet.

And that standing must already be fixed in the very first outline.

Well, I am still very pleased that I came here, whatever may happen, and whatever may be the results, whether I get on with Verlat or not.

I find here the friction of ideas which I want. I get a fresh view of my own work, can judge better where the weak points are, and in this way it enables me to correct them.

But I most urgently beg you, for the sake of a good result, to lose neither your patience nor your good spirits; it would be smashing our own windows if we lost courage, at the very moment that might give us a certain influence, if we show we know what we want and dare to do something and to carry it through.

As to the money, if I work at a studio and so have not to pay the expenses for model, fr. 150 is certainly even then not much, for painting is very expensive, but *it may be done* if one economises even on food, etc.

But if models must be paid, fr. 150 is decidedly *not enough* and one loses time, etc.

So the cheapest way is to stay at the studio, for especially for more elaborate nude studies, it is impossible to provide the models oneself.

I do not think it impossible, that in the long run, especially if the other fellows involuntarily begin to draw stronger shadows, that then Verlat or another will seek a row with me, even if I systematically avoid it. What I certainly shall do systematically, because it is to my advantage, is stay here for some time.

I am longing to hear about your apartment. As for me, if I come to Paris, I shall be perfectly contented with a cheap little room in some remote quarter (Montmartre) or a garret in an hotel,

but that is relatively unimportant, and we are not yet so far. First let us stay here for sometime, and don't let us worry before the time.

The winter course finishes on the 31st of March.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

(February.)

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. What pleases me so much is that you yourself propose now the plan of going to Cormon's.

Let me tell you how things have been going on here.

The painting course finished last week, because at the end of the course a competition is held for those who have gone through the whole course, to whom I do not belong.

I also draw in the daytime now and the teacher there who makes portraits at present and gets well paid for them has asked me repeatedly if I had never drawn from casts before and if I had taught myself to draw, and he concluded:—"Je vois que vous avez beaucoup travaillé" and "Vous ne serez pas long à faire du progrès, vous y gagneriez beaucoup—il faut un an, mais qu'est-ce que ça fait?"

Now there is one fellow of my age sitting next to me to whom he does *not* say that, and he has also painted a long time and he has been drawing from casts for three years. As a rule they draw there without background, and especially to that man in question, it is absolutely forbidden. This makes awfully dry drawings.

Now Sibert, that is the name of the teacher who also directs the class from the nude, said: "Quant à vous, vous dessinerez comme il vous plaira, puisque je vois que vous prenez le dessin au sérieux, quant aux autres, en général je ne leur permets pas de faire un fond, parce qu'alors ils escamottent le dessin des formes, tandis que sur fond blanc ils sont bien obligés de les faire, c'est donc un camisole de force."

Then he also said that Verlat had told him there was some good in my work, what Verlat did not say to me.

It happened just after the receipt of your letter that Sibert came

to look at the drawings (mine was a head of Niobe and a hand that might be of Michaelangelo). I had drawn that hand in a few hours, and that was the drawing he liked best. Now I told him that I intended to go to Cormon, and he said: "Vous ferez comme vous voudrez, mais je vous dis que Verlat en a formé plusieurs de forts et nous y tenons de former des élèves qui nous fassent honneur —et je vous engage bien fortement de rester."

This is almost a fine promise, as if they guarantee success, and what shall I do? On the other hand, I have become better acquainted with those English fellows who have been in Paris and have heard of their experiences. One has been at Gérôme's and one at Cabanel', etc.

They say that one is relatively more free in Paris and, for instance, one can choose one's subjects more than one does here, but that the correction is not worth much.

Do you know what I think?—In Paris I should certainly work *more* than here, for instance a drawing a day or every two days.

And we know, or rather you know clever fellows enough who would not refuse this to correct them and give some hints. So in fact we are at all events on the right track, whether I stay here some time or if I come to you.

For the rest Cormon would probably say the same thing as Verlat. Just because I now have the occasion to speak about my drawings with several people, I see my mistakes, and that is half-way to correcting them.

At all events let us keep courage. But you must now write a little more and we must try to do things energetically. I hear they work four hours in the morning at Cormon's, then one can go and work in the evening at the Louvre or to the Ecole des Beaux Arts or to some other studio where drawing is done.

As to the portraits, there will not be much time left for them if I want to keep up all the other things regularly. It is the same case here.

But it has struck me forcibly that there are still other things that I absolutely must change.

When I compare myself to the other fellows, there is something stiff and awkward about me, as if I had been *in prison* for ten years.

And the cause of this lies in the fact that for about ten years



I have had a difficult and harassed life, much care and sorrow and no friends.

But that will change as my work becomes better, and I shall know something and be able to do something.

And I repeat, we are on the right track to accomplish this. But do not doubt it, the road to success is to keep courage and patience and to work on energetically.

And it is a fact that I must somewhat change my outward appearance.

Perhaps you will say that has nothing to do with art, but perhaps you will agree with me! I am busy having my teeth seen to, for instance, there are no less than ten teeth which I either have lost or may lose, and that is too many and too troublesome, and besides it gives me a look of over forty which is not in my favour.

So I have decided to have that put in order. It will cost me fr. 100, but it can be done now while I am drawing, better than any other time, and I have had the bad teeth cut off and have just paid half the money in advance.

They told me at the same time that I ought to take care of my stomach, for it was not in order. And since I have been here this has been far from improving.

But if one knows where the fault lies, that is something gained, and with some energy much can be redressed.

It is not at all pleasant, but necessity breaks law, and if one wants to paint pictures one must try and keep alive and keep one's strength.

I thought my teeth were bad because of another reason, and I did not know that my stomach had deteriorated to such a degree. It is stupid if you will, but one has sometimes to choose between two evils, and is bound either on one side or the other.

During the last month it began to trouble me a great deal; I began also to cough continually too, and expectorate a greyish phlegm, etc., so that I began to feel anxious. But we will try to redress it.

You see I am not stronger than other people in so far that if I neglected myself too much, it would be the same with me as with so *many* painters (so very many if one thinks about it), I should catch my death, or worse still—become crazy or an idiot.

This is a fact, and the question is to steer clear between the

different cliffs, and even if one gets average to try to keep the ship afloat.

I know that Delacroix said he had learned the secret of painting: "*Lorsqu'il n'avait plus ni dents ni souffle.*" But I also know that from that moment he took care of himself. And that without his mistress he would have died ten years or more sooner.

So do not be angry with me at the expense. I shall try to economise, but things grew too bad and I had to remedy them.

As to what you wrote about the folks at home, I shall do in this matter what you think best.<sup>1</sup>

I am free to leave here whenever I like. Let us say the first days of March. But just consider if the help I eventually could give, would be worth the journey there and back, for I would also approve of staying here without going back and from here straight to Cormon whenever you like. The journey is rather expensive when I reckon that the luggage costs me more than my own fare.

So let us think once more about it.

I keep satisfied about having come here, otherwise I should have remained in a fix, and now, though there are still many difficulties, I see some chance of making progress.

And by staying here somewhat longer, or by going to Paris, will get a firmer hold still.

As to the plan of eventually living together, and taking a rather good studio where one can receive people if need be, keep it in mind, and let me also keep it in mind.

I see in the first place that year of drawing from which there is no escape, I am afraid. If it is not expensive, and you find good quarters, then it would be all right, but if it is expensive, it would perhaps not be the cheapest way for the first year, if we are rather hard up for the money.

The year of drawing is the critical point, after that we are free for other things, both for portrait and for landscape. I think we must put that in the first place. For there is no help for it—did not Delacroix and Corot and Millet keep thinking of the ancients and keep studying them? People who study them just in a hurry are of course quite wrong. The ancients certainly require a great

<sup>1</sup> He refers to the moving of the family from the Rectory at Nuenen to Breda, where their mother was going to settle down. Theo wished Vincent to help with the moving.

serenity, a knowledge of nature, they require tenderness and patience, otherwise they are no help.

And it is quite curious that Géricault and Delacroix both knew them more intimately than, for instance, David, and understood them better; they who were most strongly opposed to all academical routine.

I do not know yet the books by Turgenev, but some time ago I read his biography which was very interesting, how he had in common with Daudet, the passion of working from the model, resuming five or six models in one type—I do not know Ohnet either, whom I hear to be very interesting too.

I believe more and more that *L'art pour l'art*, to work for the sake of the work, *l'énergie pour l'énergie*—is after all the principle of all great artists, for one sees it from the de Goncourts how obstinacy is needed, for society will not thank them for it.

But in painting one finds a certain rest in the stories of those painters who aimed through it all at the highest.

Israëls himself, for instance, was quite unknown and still poor, even to dry bread—when he yet wanted to go to Paris, though the circumstances were discouraging enough.

*Not* to be discouraged, even though almost starving, and though one feels one has to say farewell to all material comfort in life in short.

I wish you would write a little more, now that we are discussing a change. The founding of a studio together, would perhaps be a *good thing*, but we must feel sure that we can carry it through—and we must know our own minds perfectly well, and once we begin it, we must have a certain confidence in short, left us after a long series of lost illusions.

And such a studio—in starting it one must know that it will be a battle and that people in general will be absolutely indifferent, so one ought to begin it feeling confident of some power—wanting to be somebody, wanting to be active—so that when one dies one can think: I go thither where go all those who have dared something—Well, we shall see.

Yours, with a handshake,

Vincent.

That impression I involuntarily get of myself when comparing myself to others, that I look as if I had been in prison for ten years,

is not exaggerated, but to change it—and I will change it—I must in the first place not leave the world of art too far, but stay some time longer at a studio or academy. Then it will disappear.

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Dear Theo,

I wrote you already the day before yesterday that although on one hand I felt far from well, on the other I yet began to see some light.

However, I am sorry that I must tell you more categorically, that I am literally worn out and overworked. If you consider that I went to live in my own studio (in Nuenen) on the 1st of May and that I have not had a hot dinner more than perhaps six or seven times since. I do not want you to tell mother that I am not well, for good reasons, for perhaps she would begin to worry that it was not kind to let things happen as they did, namely—that I did not stay at home to avoid these very consequences.

I will not speak about it, so don't you do so either.

But I have lived *then* and I do so here, not having money for a dinner, because the work costs me too much, and I have trusted too much on my being strong enough to hold out.

What the doctor tells me is that I absolutely must take better care of myself, and until I feel stronger I must take more rest.

It is an *absolute* breakdown.

Now I have made it worse by smoking a great deal, which I did the more because then one does not feel an empty stomach so much.

Well, *manger de la vache enragée*, that is what I have my share of.

For it is not only the food, it is at the same time all the worry and trouble one has.

You know how, for different reasons, the time in Nuenen has been far from easy for me. Then I came here, and am very glad to have done so, but it has also been a difficult time for me.

What we must do and where the greatest trouble lies is this. To pay the models oneself is too heavy, as long as one has not money enough, one must use the opportunities of the studios like

Verlat's or Cormon's. And one must live in the artist's world, and work at the clubs where one pays together for the models.

It is true I have not thought of this before, at least I have not done so, but now I wish I had done so a year earlier. If it might be arranged that we should live in the same city, it would certainly be by far the best, at least for a time.

But the more I think about it, the more I fancy it would be better perhaps not to spend too much on a studio the first year, because that first year I shall principally have to draw.

For speaking about Cormon, I think he would tell me much the same thing as Verlat, that I must draw from the nude or the casts for a year, just because I have always been drawing from life.

That is not asking too much, for I tell you that there are some here who have been plodding at it for three years, and are not yet allowed to give it up, and they also paint. In that one year I must revise the man's and the woman's figure, both in detail and as a whole, and then I shall know it almost by heart.

Drawing in itself, the technic of it, comes to me easily enough. I begin to do it like writing, with the same ease. But at that very point it becomes more interesting if one is not satisfied with the facility acquired by and by, but aims seriously and thoroughly at originality and broadness of conception—the drawing of bulk instead of the outlines, the solid modelling.

And when people like, for instance, Verlat or Cormon demand that of a fellow, I assure you it is no bad sign. For there are plenty of those whom Verlat simply leaves to drudge on, for they will never attain anything. You speak about clever fellows at that studio of Cormon—just because I would damn well like to be one of them.

I feel of my own accord that I must insist on devoting at least a year in Paris to the drawing of the nude and from the casts. For the rest, let me do what presents itself in the way of painting, if an effect out of doors strikes me or if I have a fine model, etc. And do not think this is a *long* way, for it is a *short* one. He who can draw a figure from memory is much more productive than he who cannot. And by taking that trouble of drawing for a whole year you will see how productive I shall become.

Neither must you suppose that those years of drawing out of doors have been thrown away. For that is just the thing that those who have only worked at academies and studios lack—the vision of the



reality in which they live, and the being able to find subjects. Well, would it not be wise to postpone, at least for the first half-year, the renting of a studio, just because we need the money so badly?

But for the rest, I feel great, great sympathy for the founding of a studio, inasmuch that one might perhaps combine with other painters to take models together.

The more energy the better. And in hard times especially one must look for friendship and co-operation.

But, Theo, this indisposition is a damn bad thing just now; I am awfully sorry *but yet I keep courage*. It will right itself.

You understand that if I put off remedying it, it would have become worse and worse. But my opinion is that one must not think that the people whose health is damaged, quite or partly, are no good for painting. One ought to reach the sixties, or at least the fifties, if one begins at thirty. But one need not be perfectly healthy, one may have all kinds of ailments. The work need not suffer from it. On the contrary, nervous people are more sensitive and refined.

But, Theo, just because my health is decidedly damaged, I am resolved to apply myself to the higher figure, and to try to refine myself. It fell so unexpectedly on me, I had been feeling weak and feverish, but I went on notwithstanding, but I began to feel worried when more and more teeth broke off, and I began to look more and more ill. Well, we will try to remedy it.

I think having my teeth put in order will already help, because my mouth being generally painful, I swallowed my food as quickly as possible, and it will perhaps help to improve my looks also.

As to this month I paid for my room in advance (fr. 25), for food, fr. 30 in advance, and fr. 50 to the dentist, then a visit to the doctor and some drawing materials, there remain six francs.

Now the main thing is not to fall ill this month, which is not easy to achieve, it certainly might happen. I always believe that I have a certain hardiness in common with the peasants, who also do not eat so particularly well, and yet live and work on.

But don't you worry about it. If you can send some more money, very well, but if you cannot I will await events in all calmness.

What I do not like is that I am feverish, and I argue in this way, I may have become weak, but I have taken a certain care not to use unwholesome food. Neither is over-exertion too great—because,

notwithstanding everything, I keep in good spirits, so it is only that I am overstrained because I am weak. *I think it will redress itself.* But you understand if it got worse and took a vicious turn, it might develop into typhus or at least typhoid fever. And the only reason why I do not suppose this will happen is in the first place, that I have had much fresh air, in the second place I repeat, though I have apparently not fed myself strongly enough, I have taken care to take very simple food instead of the rotten things in the cheap restaurants, and thirdly, that I have a certain calmness and serenity notwithstanding all, so we must wait and see how things go. You must not worry about it, for neither do I. I repeat, suppose I got a fever, I have lived and nourished myself too simply that it should easily become so very malignant. After all, things do not fall from the sky, and there is a reason for everything.

Do write soon for I need badly to hear from you. As to going to Nuenen, I should like to know what you think best.

But it is not *necessary* that I go, for somebody like Ryke, the gardener, for instance, can do just as well what there is of packing or despatching. But if you think it would be better, I can be ready here about March.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

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Dear Theo,

I received your letter and enclosed fr. 25, and thank you very much for both. I am very glad that you are not opposed to my plan of coming to Paris. I think it will help me to make progress, and if I did not go, I am afraid I should get into a mess, and continue to turn in the same circle, and keep making the same mistakes. Besides, for you to come home in the evening to a studio, I do not think would do you any harm.

For the rest, I must say about myself the same you write about yourself: *You will be disappointed in me.*

Yet the thing to do is to combine. And the result may be a much better understanding.

Now what shall I tell you about my health? I keep thinking there is a chance to avoid falling decidedly ill, but it will take some time to redress my health.

I have two more teeth to be filled, then my upper jaw, which was in the worst condition, will be in order. I have still to pay fr. 10 on it, and then another fr. 40 to have the lower jaw also put in order.

Some of those ten years in prison which I seem to have gone through will thus disappear. Because bad teeth, which one rarely sees nowadays when it is so easy to have them put in order, give something of a sunken look to a face.

And then, by taking the same food, one can digest better when one can chew well, so my stomach will have a better chance of recovering.

But I can feel it thoroughly that I am in a bad condition, and as you write yourself, by neglecting it, it might become much worse. But we will try to remedy it.

I have not worked for a few days. I went to bed early a few times (generally by drawing at the club it was one or two o'clock) and I feel that it does me good.

I have had a little note from mother saying that they begin to pack in March.

Further, as you speak about your lease not being up till the end of June, it is then perhaps better after all that I go back to Nuenen the beginning of March, but if I should have to meet opposition and scenes like before I left, I would lose my time there, and so I should move on though it were only for a few months, as I want to make some new things out of doors to take with me to Paris.

That Sibert, the teacher of the drawing class who first spoke to me as I wrote you, has to-day decidedly sought a row with me, perhaps with the aim of getting rid of me, but he did not succeed because I said to him: "*Pourquoi cherchez-vous dispute avec moi, je ne veux pas me disputer, et en tout cas je n'y tiens aucunement à vous contredire, seulement vous me cherchez dispute expres.*"

Apparently he did not expect this, and for this once could not say much against it, but next time he can of course raise a quarrel.

The question behind it is that the fellows at the class talk together about my work, and that I have said, not to Sibert, but

outside the class to some of the fellows, that their drawings were absolutely wrong.

I can tell you, if I went to Cormon, and if sooner or later I got into trouble either with the teacher or with the pupils, *I should not mind it a bit*. Even without a teacher I might go through that course of drawing from the ancients, by going to draw at the Louvre, for instance. And if necessary I should do so, though I should by far prefer to have correction, as long as it does not become *deliberate nagging*—that correction—without any other motive than a certain peculiarity in one's way of working which is different from that of the others.

If he begins again I shall say aloud in the class “Je veux bien faire mécaniquement tout ce que vous me direz de faire, parce que j'y tiens à vous rendre ce qui vous revient à la rigueur, si vous y tenez, mais pour ce qui est de me mécaniser comme vous mecanisez les autres, cela n'a, je vous assure, pas la moindre prise sur moi.

Vous avez du reste commencé à me dire tout autre chose, c'est à dire que vous m'avez dit à : prenez vous-y, comme vous voudrez.”

The question why I draw from the casts, *ne pas prendre par le contour mais prendre par les milieux*—I have not mastered it as yet, but I feel it more and more, and I shall certainly carry it through, it is too interesting. I wish we could be together in the Louvre some days and could talk it over. I think it would interest you.

This morning I am sending you “Chérie” especially because of the preface which will certainly strike you.

And I wish that we too at the end of our lives might work together somewhere, and looking back might say—“Firstly, we have done *this*, and secondly *that*, and thirdly *that*.”

And if we have the wish and the courage, will there be something to talk over then? We can try two things—make some good things ourselves—and collect and deal with what things we admire of other people. But we must both live somewhat better, and perhaps a step towards that is to join together.

But now, allow me to touch a delicate question. If I have said some unpleasant things about our bringing up and our home, this has been because of finding each other and understanding each other in business, and in working together, we find ourselves on a ground where there *must be* criticism.

Now, I can perfectly well understand that one can love a thing or person passionately, and cannot help it.

All right, I will not butt in, only in so far as it might make a fatal separation between us where unity is necessary. And our education, etc., will not prove to have been so good that we will keep many illusions about it, and perhaps with another education we would have been happier.

But if we keep to the positive fact of wanting to produce and to be something, then we can talk over facts where it cannot be avoided, without getting angry, even if they might touch or stand in direct relation with the Goupils or our family. Besides, these questions are between us for a better understanding of the situation, and not out of spite.

But if we undertake something, it will be for both of us no unimportant thing to improve our health, because we shall need long life, at least twenty-five or thirty years of incessant work. The present time is so interesting, if one considers that it is possible we shall still witness the beginning of the end of a society.

And in the same way as there is infinite poetry in autumn, or in a sunset, when one feels a mysterious aspiration in nature, so it is now. And in Art there is decadence if you like, after Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Dupré, Troyon, Breton, Rousseau and Daubigny *que soit*, but a decadence so full of charm that you can still expect enormously beautiful things, and they are made daily.

I am longing awfully for the Louvre, de Luxembourg, etc., where everything will be new to me.

All my life I shall regret not to have seen the *Cent Chefs-d'œuvre*, the Delacroix exhibition and the Meissonnier exhibition. But there are other things left.

It is true that wanting to get on here too quickly, I perhaps made less progress, but what shall I say, one of the reasons was also my health, and if I get that back as I hope, my work here will have been less unfruitful.

Am I right that if one asks permission one may draw from the casts in the Louvre even if one is not at the Ecole des Beaux Arts? It would not surprise me if once having got hold of the idea of living together, you will find it more and more strange that for full ten years we have been so little together.



Well, I heartily hope there is an end to that, and it will not begin again.

The apartment about which you speak is perhaps rather expensive, I mean I should like one rather cheaper just as well.

I wonder how those few months in Nuenen would be.

As I still have some furniture there, and as it is very beautiful, and as I know the neighbourhood pretty well, it would perhaps be a good thing to keep a *pied-à-terre* there in some Inn where I could leave the furniture, as otherwise it would be lost, and it may be of so much use perhaps.

The best things are sometimes made coming back to old spots.

I must finish this as I must go to the Club. Think it over which is the best way to act.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent

45<sup>1</sup>

Dear Theo,

I must write once again, for the sooner we can make up our minds the better. As to a studio, if we could find in one same house a room with an alcove and also a garret or corner of an attic, then you could have that room and alcove, and we could make ourselves as comfortable as possible. And during the daytime the room might serve as a studio, and the garret would serve for diverse unsightly implements, and for dirty work, besides, I could sleep there, and you in the alcove of the studio.

Such an arrangement or similar would be perfectly satisfactory for the first year I think. What I am not sure of, is whether we shall agree personally, though I don't despair of it, but it will be much cosier for you to come home in the evening to a studio than to an ordinary room which is always more or less dismal, and that dismalness is our worst enemy.

When the doctor tells me that I must improve my physical way of living, who knows that you would also find yourself the better for such a measure. For you too are neither happy nor in good enough spirits, let us call things by their names, you have too much care and too little prosperity.

But the fault lies perhaps in ourselves, that we are both too isolated, and that our forces and resources are too much divided and therefore insufficient. So union is strength, that would be much better.

So I think there must be more animation, and we must throw overboard all doubt and a certain lack of confidence. Do you want a motive for keeping one's serenity even when one stands isolated and misunderstood, and has lost all chance of material happiness?

This one thing remains—*faith*; one feels instinctively that many things are changing and that everything will change. We are living in the last quarter of a century which will end again in an enormous revolution.

But suppose both of us at the end of our lives see its beginning. We shall certainly not live to see the better times of pure air and the refreshing of the whole society after those big storms.

But it is already something not to be the dupe of the falseness of one's time, and to scent the unhealthy closeness and oppressiveness of the hours that precede the thunderstorm.

And to say: we are still in the closeness, but the following generations will be able to breathe more freely.

A Zola and de Goncourts believe in it with the simplicity of grown-up children. They, the most rigorous analysts whose diagnosis is both so callous and so exact.

And the very ones you have named too, Turgenev and Daudet, they do not work without an aim or without a glance beyond. But all and with reason avoid the prophesying of Utopias, and are pessimistic in so far that if one begins to analyse, the history of this country shows terribly how revolutions take an ugly turn, though they began ever so nobly.

You see the thing that supports one, is that one has not always to be alone with one's feelings and thoughts when one works and thinks together with other people.

That increases one's strength at the same time, and one is infinitely happier.

Now I have wanted it to be so between us already for a long time, and I fancy if you stayed alone, you would get depressed because times are not cheerful *unless one finds satisfaction in one's work*.

I am sending you that novel by de Goncourt, especially for the

sake of the preface, which gives a summary of their work and aim. You will see that those people have not been exactly *happy* in the same way as Delacroix said of himself: "je n'ai pas du tout été heureux dans le sens ou je l'entendais, le désirais autrefois." Well, it may come sooner or later, but for you too, there will come a moment that you will know *for sure* all chance of material happiness is lost, fatally and irrevocably. I feel sure of it, but also know that at the same moment there will be a certain compensation in feeling in one's self the power to work.

What I find pathetic, is the great serenity of the great thinkers of the present, as, for instance, that last walk of the two de Goncourts, of which you will read the description. So were the last days of the old Turgenev, too; he was much with Daudet then. Sensitive, subtle, intelligent like women, also sensitive to their own suffering, and yet always full of life and self-consciousness, no indifferent stoicism, no contempt for life. I repeat—those fellows, they die like women die. No fixed idea about God, no abstractions, always on the firm ground of life itself, and only attached to that. I repeat—like *the women* who have loved much, pathetic, and like Sylvestre tells about Delacroix: "Ainsi il mourut presque en souriant."

Meanwhile we are not so far as yet; on the contrary, we have first to work, first to live, be it then without happiness in the ordinary sense of the word.

But whatever there may be of the future, you may be sure that I shall be very glad if I can work a year at Cormon's, unless there is a better opportunity for drawing at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, or some other studio which I have heard mentioned here.

The ancients will not prevent us from being realistic, on the contrary. Of course I am also longing enormously for the French pictures.

A propos—don't you like this little poem:—

Tout le mal est venu de la femme—Raison  
Obscurcie, appétit de lucre, trahison,  
Coupes d'or où les vins sont mélangés de lie,  
Tout crime, tout mensonge heureux, toute folie  
Vient d'elle . . . Adorez-la pourtant, puisque les dieux  
L'ont faite . . . et, c'est encore ce qu'ils ont fait de mieux

Painting has after all the secret of being able to give one a second youth.

Tell me, have you ever read anything of Carlyle's? Perhaps it is not even necessary if you only see the face of that man, and know that his work is something like that of Michelet; Whistler and Legros, both have painted his portrait.

He is also one who dared a great deal, and had a different insight in things than the rest. But the more of their lives I trace, I find always the same story, lack of money, bad health, opposition, isolation, in short, trouble from beginning to end.

The article by Manz on Paul Baudry was very good, and this I like especially:—"Il a travaillé au renouvellement du sourire."

Could one say of Delacroix "Il a travaillé au renouvellement de la passion?" Perhaps so. Well, at all events write soon.

Good-bye,

Yours,

Vincent.

452

Dear Theo,

I decidedly want to tell you that it would greatly tranquillise me if you would approve of my coming to Paris much earlier than June or July. The more I think about it the more anxious I am to do so.

Just think that if all goes well, and if I had good food, etc., all that time, which certainly will leave something to be desired, even in that case it will take about six months before I shall have quite recovered.

But it would certainly last much longer still if in Brabant from March to July I had to go through the same things as I have had to these last months, and probably it would not be different.

Now, at this moment, I feel terribly weak, even worse than that, from reaction after overwork, but that is the natural course of things and nothing extraordinary, but as it is a question of taking better nourishment, etc., you see in Brabant I shall drain myself again by taking models; the same story will begin all over again, and I do not think that will be right. In that way we stray from

our path. So please allow me to come sooner, I should almost say at once.

If I rent a garret in Paris, and bring my painting box and drawing materials with me, then I can finish at once what is most pressing—those studies from the ancients, which certainly will help me a great deal when I go to Cormon's. I can go and draw either at the Louvre or at the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

For the rest, before settling in a new place, we could plan and arrange so much better. If it must be, I am willing to go to Nuenen for the month of March, to see how things are there and how the people are and whether or no I can get models there. But if not so, which I presume, I should come straight to Paris after March, and begin to draw at the Louvre, for instance.

I have thought it over well what you wrote about taking a studio, but I think it would be a good thing if we looked for it together, and that before we went to live together definitely, we did so temporarily, and that I began by renting a garret from April, for instance till June.

I shall then feel at home again in Paris by the time I go to Cormon's.

And in this way I shall keep up my spirits better.

I must also tell you that, although I keep going there, it is often almost unbearable, the nagging of the people at the academy, for they remain decidedly spiteful.

But I try systematically to avoid all quarrels, and go my own way. And I fancy I am finding the trace of what I am seeking, and perhaps I should find it the sooner if I could follow my own way with the drawing from the casts.

I am glad after all I went to the academy, for the very reason that I have abundant opportunity to observe the results of *prendre par le contour*.

For that is what they do systematically, and that is why they are nagging at me. "Faites d'abord un contour, votre contour n'est pas juste, je ne corrigerai pas ça, si vous modelez avant d'avoir sérieusement arrêté votre contour."

You see that is the upshot of everything. And now you ought to see how flat, how lifeless and how insipid the results of that system are; oh, I can tell you I am very glad just to see it once from near by. Like David, or worse still, like Pieneman in full vigour. I



wanted at least twenty-five times to say, "Votre contour est un truc, etc.," but I have not thought it worth while to quarrel. Yet though I do not say anything, I irritate them, and they do me.

But this does not matter so much, the question is to go on trying to find a better system of working. So—patience and perseverance.

They go so far as to say, "La couleur et le modelé c'est peu de chose, cela s'apprend très vite, c'est le contour qui est l'essentiel et le plus difficile."

You see, one can learn some news at the academy. I have never known before that colour and modelling came so easily.

I just finished yesterday the drawing which I made for the competition of the evening class. It is the figure of Germanicus which you know. Well, I am sure I shall be the last, because all the drawings of the others are just alike, and mine is absolutely different. But that drawing which they will think the best, I have seen it made. I was sitting just behind it and it is correct, it is whatever you like, but it is *dead*, and that is what all the drawings are which I saw.

Enough of this, but let it bore us so much that it makes us enthusiastic for something nobler, and that we hasten to reach this.

You, too, need more animation in your life, and if we might succeed in joining, together we would know more than each apart, and would be able to do more.

Tell me, did you notice that subtle saying of Paul Manz: "Dans la vie les femmes sont peut-être la difficulté suprême." It was in an article on Baudry.

We shall experience our share of it, besides the experience we may already have made.

It struck me in a chapter from "L'Œuvre," by Zola, in the *Gil Blas*, that the painter, Manet of course, had a scene with a woman who had posed for him, and afterwards he had become indifferent to her, oh—curiously well described. What one can learn in this respect from the academy here is then not to paint women.

They hardly ever use nude women models. At least in the class not at all, and with great exception privately.

Even in the antique class there are ten men's figures to one woman's figure. That is easy enough.

In Paris, of course, this will be better, and it seems to me that, in

fact, one learns so much from the constant comparing of the masculine with the feminine, which is always and in everything so totally different. It may be supremely difficult, but what would art and what would life be without it?

Good-bye, write to me soon. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

My being in Nuenen at least for the month of March would only be for the sake of the moving, and I have to be there still for the sake of my change of domicile. But as to myself, I am quite willing not to go back there at all.

453

Dear Theo,

I write to you often these days, and I write often the same thing, but let it prove to you that I have one thing especially in mind—the necessity of starting that time of figure drawing.

And then it may be egotistical if you like, I want my health restored. My impression of the time I have spent here does not change either; relatively I am very much disappointed in what I have made here, but my ideas have been modified and refreshed, and that has been the real object of my coming here. But as I have perceived as to my health, that I trusted too much on it, and that, though the core is all right still, yet I am but a ruin of what I might have been, so it would not astonish me at all if you, too, were absolutely in need of that same more hygienic life that was prescribed for me.

If I am not mistaken in this, I think we cannot join each other soon enough, and I keep objecting to a stay in the country. For though the air is bracing, I should miss there the distraction and the sociability of the city, which we would enjoy so much more if we were together. And if we were together soon, I should disappoint you in many things, yes, to be sure, but not in everything, and not in my way of looking at things, I suppose.

At the beginning of our discussing things, I must tell you that

I wish both of us might find a wife in some way or other before long, for it is high time, and if we should wait too long, we should not become the better for it.

But I say this in all calmness. However, it is one of the first requisites for our more hygienic life. And I mention it because we will find there an enormous difficulty to conquer, on which a great deal depends. And herewith I break the ice on the subject; we shall always have to come back on it. And in the intercourse with women one especially learns so much about art.

It is a pity that, as one gradually gains experience, one gradually loses one's youth. If that were not so life would be too good.

Have you already read that preface of "Chérie" by de Goncourt? The amount of work those fellows have achieved is enormous, if one comes to think of it.

It is such a splendid idea that working and thinking together. And daily I find proof for the theory that the chief reason for much misery among the artists lies in their mutual discord, in not co-operating, in not being good to each other, but false. And now, if we were more sensible in that respect, I do not doubt for a moment, but within a year's time we should be on a better way, and happier.

I do not get on very well with my work, but I do not force it, because it is in fact almost quite forbidden to me.

And I want to keep my strength for that first time in Paris, if that is to follow first, without other intermittence but that one month in the country. For I should like to come there in good condition.

It was Sunday to-day, almost a spring day. This morning I took a long walk alone all through the city, in the park, along the boulevards. The weather was such that I think in the country they will have heard the lark sing for the first time.

In short, there was something of resurrection in the atmosphere.

Yet what depression there is in business and among the people. I do not think it exaggerated if one is pessimistic about the different strikes, etc., everywhere.

For following generations they will certainly prove not to be useless, for *then* they will have proved a success. But now it is of course hard enough for everybody who must earn his bread by his

work, the more so because we can foresee that it will get worse and worse from year to year. The labourer against the bourgeois is as justifiable as was the *tiers état* against the other two a hundred years ago. And the best thing to do is to keep silent, for the bourgeois have not the luck on their side, and we shall live to see more of it; we are still far from the end. So though it is spring, how many thousands and thousands walk about in desolation.

As well as the greatest optimist, I see the lark soaring in the spring air, but I also see the young girl of about twenty, who might have been in good health, a victim to consumption, and who perhaps will drown herself before she dies of an illness.

If one is always in respectable company among rather well-to-do bourgeois, one does not notice this so much perhaps, but if one has dined for years on *la vache enragée*, as I did, one cannot deny that great misery is a fact that weighs down the scale.

One may not be able to cure or to save, but one can sympathize with and share in it.

Corot, who after all had more serenity than anybody else, who felt the spring so deeply, was he not all his life as simple as a working man, and so sensitive to all the miseries of others, and what struck me in a biography of his, when he was already very old in 70 and 71 he certainly looked at the bright sky, but at the same time he visited the ambulances where the wounded lay dying.

Illusions may fade, but the *sublime remains*. If one should doubt of everything one does not doubt of people like Corot and Millet and Delacroix. And I think that in moments when one does not care any more for nature, one still cares for humanity.

If you can, send me something extra this month, be it more or less, if it were only five francs, do so. If you cannot, then it can't be helped.

I am greatly longing to know your decision, if perhaps you would approve of my coming to Paris already about the 1st of April. At all events write soon about it.

Good-bye. With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

Dear Theo,

Of course all my attention is concentrated on gaining what I want to gain, namely—free scope to make my career. That means to overcome the obstacles instead of giving way under them. I have told you already that my health is very low, and that I shall have to act energetically to redress it.

I have told you already that there is no reason for me to go and work again in the country for the first year, that for my whole future it is infinitely better for me to draw from the casts, and from the nude in the city. Must one or must one not be on one's guard against a general fall of prices, diverse slumps, and in consequence of this, the eventual slackness of trade in the last years. However, I do not ask you to have a fixed opinion about it. I have not one either.

On such a large range one cannot predict anything with certainty. So let us leave it at that. But if one analyses from near-by, one sees that the greatest and most energetic people of the century have always worked *against the grain*, and they have always worked from personal initiative. Both in painting and in literature. (I do not know anything about music, but I suppose there it has been the same.) To begin on a small scale, to persevere *quand même*, to produce much with small capital, to have character instead of money, more audacity than credit, that was typical of Millet and Sensier, of Balzac, Zola, de Goncourt, of Delacroix. But to start a studio at once in Paris would perhaps be not so well as doing it after *a year of study* both for you and for me.

Let me draw for a year at Cormon's, do you meanwhile thoroughly investigate business once more, and the diverse opportunities. And then I think we may risk it.

Because in a time of money crisis like the present, money is what ammunition is to a soldier in a hostile country—don't let us spill our powder.

Further—I have heard several fellows, both painters and ordinary people, complain:—"I have taken an expensive room to induce people to come to me, but since then nobody has come, and I myself do not feel at home in it."

Still I believe that for portraits it is necessary to bring a certain



comfort in the studio, otherwise the people who come to pose there get bored.

But if one wants to begin that, one must think over well where to rent it, where one has most chance of getting visitors, and making friends, and getting known.

In consequence of the necessity of especially drawing for a year, the question of a good studio is *for the moment* quite secondary, and anything will do.

I don't think if we do it in all calmness and intelligence, that this year of drawing would be a misfortune. On the contrary, we have time to consider everything at our ease, and to look before we leap.

If I came to Paris, the most practical thing to do would be to wait for a year before taking a studio. In that year we would learn to know each other better and more intimately, which may bring a great change, and then we can begin to expand with greater security because meanwhile we shall have fortified the weak points.

If we work for another year, if we repair our health, both you and I—*then* we can resist things so much better than *now*.

But what must I do now? Look here, to go back to Brabant is really a roundabout way, and I shall lose money and time on it. Why cannot I go straight from here to Paris, if you like, and go on working here till I leave? I tell you, I am in such a wretched condition, that if there is any money to spare, let me look to my health then, and let the rest go, for at home they can just as well manage with a hired man, even better perhaps.

If I do not take some nourishing food I am sure to fall ill. It would not be my fault, and indeed I should not care much, let happen what may.

If I go to Brabant, I have the expenses of my journey, I must also pay for my room there, which I had given up, and must find another place to store my things, which would be no less than fifty francs rent, and another fifty francs in advance for a new place of storage and for moving. I should also be obliged to pay an outstanding bill for paint, and of course I should begin to paint there again.

Now I thought that by the force of circumstances, I am free to declare myself unable to fulfil for the moment those obligations.

So not to pay my rent there but to say:—"put my furniture in your attic, keep it as security, I shall pay you when I come to fetch it," then I need not rent a new place for storage.

If I have the weakness to pay all the time, even *though I cannot afford it*, I do myself *too much* harm, and make myself unfit for my work.

I think you will agree with that. If you remember how of late I complained, that I could not go on in that way, you see it was not in vain.

If I had known before what I noticed here about opportunities to work in the studio, I should have done it sooner.

Now—as I *must* go on, and as I am ill at the same time, I cannot but ask you to allow me to stay here till I go to Paris, and let me go to Paris not later at least than when the course here finishes—that is the 31st of March.

We have still then the unavoidable expenses of the journey to Paris. You have to move too, which also brings its expenses. So Brabant is a roundabout way, a loss of time, etc.

Now things stand so, that I must live from hand to mouth, and what is unpaid must wait.

When I have recovered my health, and begin to sell in Paris—all right, then I can pay the rent and the paint.

Now I *cannot*, I don't have the money, neither have you, that's all.

Besides, I have had so much wrangling yonder, that I need not consider anybody's feelings there.

It would also be weakness on your part if you tried to change it.

You write to me continually that you have no money, all right, so that is a fact. To *make* money, if that is not possible for food, need not be possible for rent either, or for superfluous travelling expenses.

And I know too well that at home Ryke the gardener or Husing is much more fit than I to pack things and to dispatch them. If I were there I should do it, but to travel there on purpose, when there are at least six pairs of hands as good as mine at their disposal, No. After all I don't care, but I tell you only what is right, and I point out to you the urgency of carrying through what helps us on. It would not be pleasant for me either to come back ill; you can say nothing against that.

Let me first recover my health, I am now too low beneath the mark.

In short—the outcome of this and the previous letter is this:—To go on quietly either here, or much better still, at Cormon's; besides I am ill, though I keep going.

If I saw a possibility of doing it, I should not object to going back to Brabant. I should even do so gladly if I could, but neither you nor I have the means, and they can better spare me there than use me.

Good-bye—write to me soon,

Yours,

Vincent.

455

Dear Theo,

I am longing very much to hear from you, for the time has come for me to make a decision.

There are but ten days left in the month, and I have to know what I must do.

However, I for my part have come to a decision. I only wish you would see things as I do.

If you approve of the plan of my coming to Paris as soon as possible, so after having been for a short time in Brabant, I shall send you from here the studies and drawings I have here.

But I must hasten to send them, otherwise I shall have to stay here longer again.

I should also like so very much to finish having my teeth seen to. What must I do?

All in all I have one franc fifty centimes left, and as to my food, I paid five francs in advance until the end of the month.

In so many ways it would be such a good thing to change soon.

You understand that no money is left to take painting materials from here to Brabant, so I shall be doubly in a fix there, both as regards models and paint.

So there is no choice, besides, what need is there to choose? For what is most pressing must be done first, and that is that time of drawing from the nude and the casts.

Perhaps I write to you somewhat abruptly, but it may not be

put off. For the rest, it is nothing but natural that there cannot be any objection to finding a garret at once in Paris, the very first day of my arrival, and then I can go and draw at the Louvre or the Ecole des Beaux Arts, so I shall be quite prepared for Cormon. So don't let us hesitate or be too long in deciding.

We must put our shoulders to the wheel. Well, let us do so.

If ever we want to do some good, you may be sure that more and more things will depend on quickness and decision of action, and as notwithstanding all the trouble one may take, nobody can be sure of the result of his undertaking—there is no harm in some daring and energy.

So if it were at all possible, I should like to have that job on my teeth finished this month. I should like to pack my studies and send them to you, and then leave here the last of this month, or even a few days sooner.

But not stay again in March, on account of the rent.

Would this be possible? Then I can help them to pack at home, if it would be of any use to them. And if I can paint or draw a little there, so much the better. But the sooner and the more energetically we go through that time of drawing in Paris, the better it will be for the whole future, even the little I did of it these last few weeks here I feel is of use to me. And if I did not do so, and tried another way direct from nature, I should always have trouble from people who had been at some academy, who would say that I cannot draw according to them.

How things will go with me here at the academy I do not definitely know yet. I think I wrote you recently, did I not, that they absolutely *sought* a quarrel with me.

Yesterday I heard that Sibert, the teacher, had said to somebody that I had a good idea of drawing, and that he had been rather too hasty.

As he does not come in the class often, I have not seen him for a few days.

I am working at the moment on a woman's bust.

Good-bye, do write as soon as you can. My health remains pretty well the same, but still I believe it is beginning to improve.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

If I did not insist on it, namely, going to Paris, I should not recover, for I must try to earn more. I live too poorly now. If one had not to pay so many other things, one could live very well on fr. 150, but now there are too many things to pay.

But after all, my health is improving, and it will come all right.

456

Dear Theo,

(18th February.)

At the moment that all my money is gone, absolutely gone, I write to you once again.

If you can send anything, be it only fr. 5, do so. There are still ten days in the month left, and how am I to get through them? For I have absolutely *nothing* left. Even at the baker's, *nothing*.

I know but one thing, that all those things prove decidedly that I cannot act otherwise than I wrote you—namely—by not postponing going to Paris.

For the rest, you will notice from the last work which you have not seen yet, that if I let painting rest for a short while, I do this in all confidence, for I shall not easily get out of practice from working with the brush. I will also send you the drawings from the casts, that is unusual work for me, and I shall get it better still.

Like the woman's bust I finished to-day, which is more distinguished in modelling and less brusque than the first ones, where the figures involuntarily remind one of peasants or woodcutters.

If I had not been ill, I should have been able to do more here.

What we have to do, is to go quietly on, but that time of drawing cannot be avoided, and it is the most pressing.

And I am so sure that it will help me at Cormon's if I spend the time between on nothing but drawing. Whatever there may be to come from Cormon, he will be like the rest in so far that he will not have much time.

And he who wants to learn from those people must already bring as much positive knowledge as possible. And it is almost certain that all who are at his studio have drawn a great deal from the casts, and that no matter how free and liberal the studio may otherwise be, this is the basis of everything.

So let us act wisely. For outdoor studies they care a little, but



not much. And the people who have been in Paris all say the same thing.

At Cormon's I suppose I shall have to paint a nude figure from nature, as some proof, and the better I know the structure by heart the more and the better he will be able and willing to tell me things.

For the rest, we must see how we can get on together. I hope we shall, but if not, then we would be more sure about it if we had had a trial of a few months.

And what I say about coming straight to Paris, will be an economy for you, for with travelling to and from, with starting relatively expensive work in Brabant, we cannot manage with the usual allowance, and in Paris we can.

And if we can manage with the money, so much the better, then we shall not be so hard up and might lay up a provision of painting material before the summer, so that everything will not come at once.

Don't be offended when I, too, calculate for once what is possible and what not.

I am reading again the book by Bracquemond and I find it every time more beautiful.

I feel that you do not agree with my coming straight to Paris, otherwise you would have already answered me. And yet it is better to do so at once. I have here the opportunity of consulting about it people who work quite seriously, and I am fully convinced it will be best so. In fact it ought to have happened long ago.

But do not worry too much over it, we shall not fail, but what I tell you is true—from the moment that I mail this letter till I get your answer, which I hope, however, will cross with mine, I am without a cent, and it is fasting day again.

Well, let us hope we shall be together soon, and that the worst will be over.

Good-bye, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

I do not trust the people with whom I live, so if you send a letter with money, as you did recently, it is safer to have the letter registered.

I have just read "La Dame aux Camelias," by Dumas. It is very fine. Do you know it?

Dear Theo,

I tore up a letter which I had first written to you, that is why you get my answer somewhat later. I begin by thanking you for the fr. 50, which I appreciate, as I do everything you do for me. But as I began to say, your letter disappoints me, as you do not comply with my request, for I stick to my opinion that the reasons I gave you in my last letter for coming sooner, were but logical. But as I will not quarrel about it after all, I only beg of you to reconsider it.

With regard to Cormon, it is decidedly better for me to go on drawing from the casts than to work out of doors, because the better I memorise the structure of the figure, the better I shall be able to copy it. I shall have to do with people who have drawn from the casts for *years*, if I do it for *months* it will not be too long. I am perhaps more daring in dashing things down, and grasping the ensemble, than many others, because I have always worked from nature.

But the others have perhaps more knowledge of the nude, for which I had not the opportunity. The sooner I make up for that the better, the more I shall be able to profit at Cormon's.

Then my health, if I work outdoors I do not eat, and I cannot get well. For I frequently have a collapse; my health is far from being what it ought to be.

Now as to the expenses, I believe it will be all about the same. So just consider it over again—we must *act*, for we must put our shoulders to the wheel.

All the time that I was here, I had a comrade, an old Frenchman, and I have painted his portrait which Verlat approved of, and which you will see. For him the winter was still worse than for me, and the poor devil is much worse off than I am, because his age makes it very critical. To-day I was with him at the same doctor's whom I had too, and probably he will have to go to the hospital, and undergo an operation, which will be decided to-morrow. At least I persuaded him to it, but he was so nervous about it that it took a long time to persuade him to go and hear his sentence.

He knew that it was going to be rather serious, and he dared not trust himself to the hospital doctor.

I wonder what will be decided. It is possible that for his sake I shall stay here a few days longer in March. After all there is nothing in the world as interesting as people, and one can never study them enough. And that is why people like Turgenev are such great masters, because they teach us to observe.

The books of to-day since Balzac for instance, are different from all that has been written in former centuries, and perhaps more beautiful.

I am longing especially for Turgenev because I have read an article by Daudet about him, in which both his character and his work were analysed—very beautifully.

For as a man, he is an example, and in his old age he remained always young as regards *working hard*, being dissatisfied with himself and trying to do always better and better.

Good-bye, but think it over well—it would be such a relief if you could see this matter as I do.

And I should not insist so much if I did not think it necessary, especially in regard to June, that I continue directly drawing from the casts. Well, write soon. I would much rather paint something else, but for the sake of practical use it cannot be avoided.

With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.

It is because after all I think my stay in Antwerp has been of use to me, that I believe we must go straight on.

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Dear Theo,

I write to you once more, because my time here has at all events come almost to an end, and I have to go back one of these days. The time of working out of doors will be there at the least change of the weather, so if it must be, and if you wish it, my being in Brabant would not be quite in vain. But however it may be, I continue to induce you rather to carry out the plan of Cormon, and what I, for my part, would like so much to do first, is to go on drawing from the casts, for a time.

I fancy my health is improving a little, at least in so far that I can digest my food a little better. But it always remains unsteady, and one day it differs from another.

I have finished another drawing from a cast, and since I wrote to you, that the teacher had said indirectly it had not been his intention to offend me, there has been no further trouble between us, and he even said that my drawing of to-day hardly needed any correction of proportion, and none at all of tone. So I should almost dare to hope that I shall also manage with Cormon, however he may be, and that makes me long the more to be there. Well, if I may have some chance with my health, I hope to make some progress this year.

I also continue to believe that there will be some work for me to find, though I have not been lucky in that respect.

But my time has been taken almost completely by my work at the academy.

From what I hear, what the fellows eventually sell are always portraits. There must be a fine exhibition of impressionists in Brussels.

You see, since I have heard and seen here from the other fellows, who concentrate themselves on the figure, how they manage—and you see they all have more to spend than I—they have always made use of models at some studio in the city, just for the sake of the expenses. And one has at the same time connections, and sees how other people work.

And involuntarily it strikes me every moment, that perhaps we ought to have taken that measure, two or two and a half years ago, reason the more not to put it off any longer now.

After all Antwerp has pleased me very well. Of course I wish I had arrived there with the experience which I have now at the moment that I leave. But if that were possible, things would be easier, and one always begins everywhere by being a greenhorn. But I hope to come back to Antwerp some time, for life is rather free and artistic there, if one looks for it, more than anywhere else perhaps. Then one sees there all kinds of people, English, French, German and Belgian, and that gives variation.

If there is one city that resembles Paris, it is rather Antwerp than Brussels, in the first place, because it is a centre for people of all nationalities, secondly, for the sake of business, and in the

third place for the sake of its liveliness, and that one can amuse oneself there.

If the course at the academy continues, I should like to stay, but unluckily there is from May nothing but competitions, and the day class for the antique, and these too are almost over.

And now I have not seen Antwerp in a flourishing condition, for one generally hears that it used to be much livelier, and that now it is oppressed by two crises at the time—in the first place the general one, and then besides the bad consequences of the exhibition in the form of numbers of fraudulent or common bankruptcies.

Think it over well again, if we cannot find a combination which would render it possible for me to come to Paris before June. I should like it so much, because I believe it would be better for so many reasons, which I have named to you already. To which I may add, that I think we can talk over so much better the taking of a studio about June, if we both are together in Paris before, and can investigate the pros and cons.

Well write to me soon With a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent.





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